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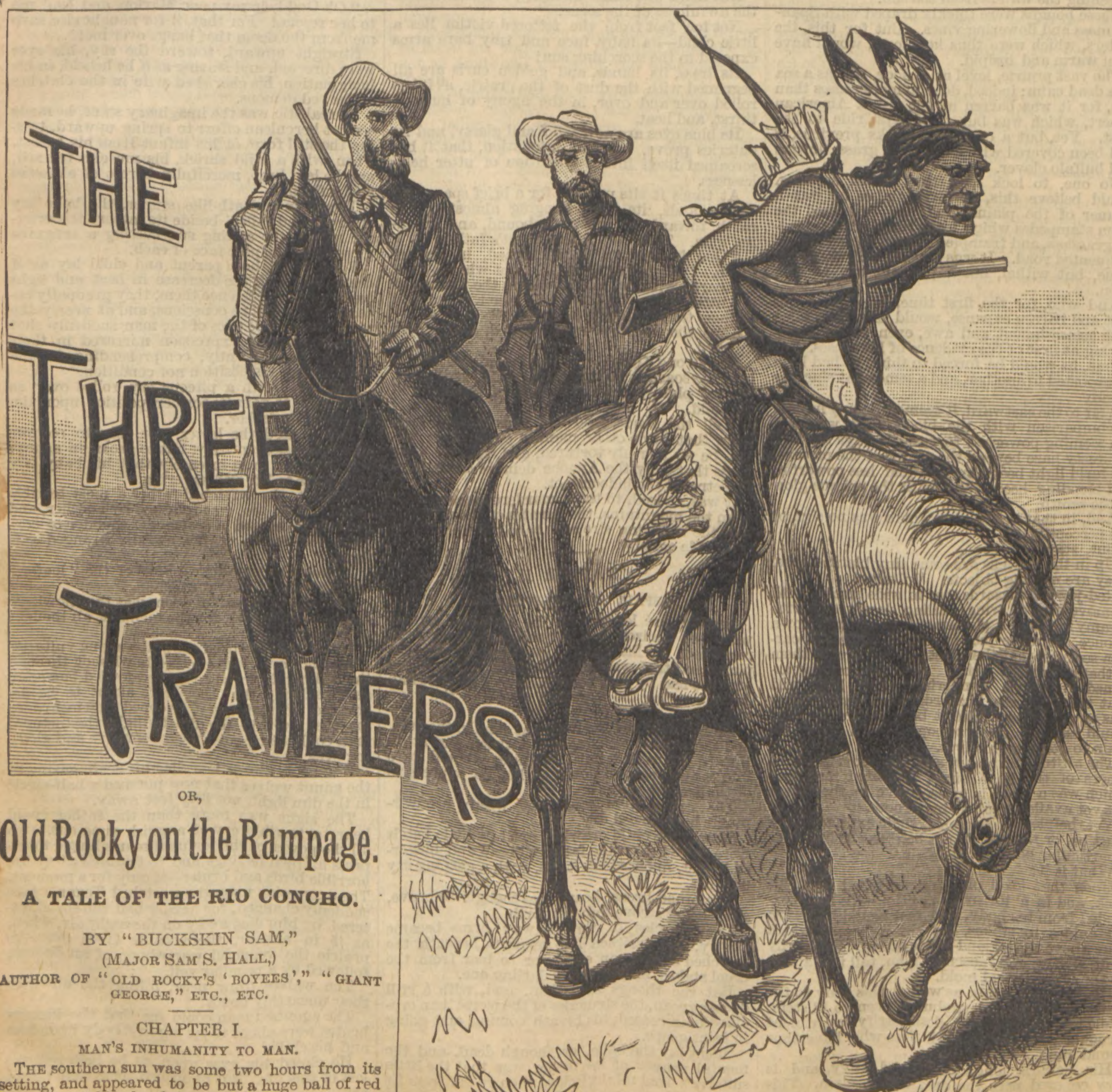
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OR, Old Rocky on the Rampage.

A TALE OF THE RIO CONCHO.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM,"

(MAJOR SAM S. HALL.)

AUTHOR OF "OLD ROCKY'S 'BOYEES'," "GIANT
GEORGE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN.

THE southern sun was some two hours from its setting, and appeared to be but a huge ball of red fire, almost blood-red indeed, slowly sinking toward the level and unbroken horizon, and casting its lurid rays slightly aslant over a broad Texan

FOLLOWED BY HIS TWO WHITE PARDS, THE CREEPING CAT WENT CAUTIOUSLY FORWARD.

Sam Southwell

prairie. The atmosphere was hazy and quivering, and seemed filled with the finest of dust, almost impalpable, which now crimsoned by the declining rays of Old Sol, fairly agonized the eyes to look upon, if one gazed toward the westward.

The appearance of the prairie, hard trampled, and entirely devoid of grass, proved conclusively that this particular section, which we now bring before the reader's notice, was included in the great bison range; as the buffaloes, thousands in number, migrated toward the south, on the eastern borders of the *Llano Estacado*, or Staked Plains, in *ante bellum* days.

The peculiar aspect of sky and air, to which we have alluded—viz., the universal prevalence of impalpable dust—proved that, since dawn, an immense stampede of bison had thundered over the broad expanse of prairie.

As far as eye could reach, east, south, and west, there was naught to break the view, except the seemingly limitless plains, without even a bush, stone, or hillock to relieve the dreary monotony. But, to the north, stretching some two miles from east to west, was a dark green serpentine line upon the savannah, which marked the course of a tributary of the Rio Concho. This was but a creek, but there was a timbered bottom on either side, with dense undergrowth beneath, reaching over and entwining, and thus screening the waters from the sun.

These boughs were thickly draped with Spanish moss and flowering vines. But for this, the waters, which were thus kept cool, would have been warm and insipid.

The vast prairie, level as a floor, was as a sea in a dead calm; indeed, dead in more senses than one, for it was barren as the Great American Desert, which was but two days' ride to the west. Yet, but a couple of weeks previous, it had been covered with rich, rank grass, flowers and buffalo clover.

No one, to look over that broad expanse, would believe this, however, unless he was a roamer of the plains, and had witnessed the bison stampedes which leave the blooming prairie grassless, and trampled as hard as any much-frequented road. It was a weird and wondrous scene, but withal, not a pleasant one to look upon.

And who, for the first time, gazed upon this vast and barren expanse, would have been filled with astonishment and awe, even to the disbelieving at first of the evidence of his senses. For a time, he would be forced to think he had been transported to another, and a somewhat singular sphere.

Afar to the eastward, it seemed gloomy indeed, in comparison with the blood-hued west, the sun seeming powerless to cast its rays through the dusty haze beyond the center of the picture, the lurid light becoming less and less powerful, and blending beautifully with the opaque glow of the zenith.

And, in that broad view, there was no sign of life perceptible.

But, stay—

Up in the heavens are some tiny black specks. They are moving objects. Vultures!

Red-jowled buzzards soar in wide circles, with no movement of wing, sailing slowly, and with dreamy motion. A plainsman would have known at once, from the movements of these foul carrion-seekers, that their instinct had drawn them to that particular point. And yet, one accustomed to prairie wanderings could have told that the prey the buzzards were anticipating was as yet living. Had it been otherwise, they would have at once swooped down upon the plain to gorge themselves.

The altitude of many, and the movements of others of the huge birds, indicated that that which was a feast in prospective to them, was not yet available for their purpose.

Yet, helpless or wounded, their expected prey must be, or they would not be thus circling over a particular point on the plain.

What is it?

Upon that level plain, outstretched upon his back, and in a torturing position—his limbs extended from his body, and fast bound by wrists and ankles to stakes, but six inches of which were above the ground—thus bound, is a heavily built, strong, and muscular man, tall in stature, and of symmetrical mold.

His feet and arms, as well as his body to the waist, are bare, and sunburnt even to blisters; while bruises and torn flesh testify to a violent struggle with the fiendish foes who have thus bound him.

His hair is long, black, and wavy, and is now covered with the dust of the plain. This had been hollowed out beneath his head, from his writhings and twistings in his torture.

His eyes are wild and glaring.

The strong bands of buffalo-skin have cut into his wrists and ankles, and the flesh around them is inflamed and swollen.

His mouth is open; his teeth gleam white and clinched, and occasionally grind together.

His broad breast heaves, and his muscles swell out in great knots, as he struggles, but in vain, to break free from his cruel bonds.

His face, naturally handsome, indicates an age in the vicinity of two and twenty, and is now contorted with agony.

Sounds, from time to time, strike his ears, cutting through his brain like ragged-edged darts of red-hot steel, and causing him to strive for a view in the direction from which they proceeded.

What are the nature of these sounds?

To witness the expression of anguish that they produced upon the face of the tortured man, one would know that they came from one so dear that his own agony of body was as nothing compared with the awful anguish produced by them.

Who would, for a moment, deem it possible, that the cry of a babe could, or would, be heard in such a place? And yet, this was the sound he heard! It broke the awful stillness on that barren plain each cry being echoed by a groan of mortal anguish from the strong but helpless man.

But there was still something, which increased the awfulness of the scene.

Not ten feet from the fettered victim lies a little child—its baby face and tiny bare arms exposed to the scorching sun!

Its dress, its hands, and golden curls are all begrimed with the dust of the prairie, as it has rolled over and over, in the agony of hunger, thirst, and heat.

Its blue eyes are now wild and glassy, and its outcries prove, by their intonation, that it has screamed itself into a condition of utter helplessness.

At times it sits upward for a brief space, and then crawls, its head hanging almost to the earth, toward the prostrate, bound, and groaning man. That man is the infant's father.

"God in heaven!" he exclaimed, in his anguish. "My agony is terrible, but what is that, compared with having to witness the torture of my little one? My brain will burst. Merciful Father, take my child to Thyself!"

Thus the wretched man prayed, as he gazed upward.

His strong frame was convulsed, as he beheld the soaring carrion birds, which suggested, but too plainly, the dread fate of himself and his child.

Well the fiends, who had thus secured him, knew that in no other manner could their victim be so terribly tortured, and well we may guess that only the Apache demons could have perpetrated the hideous act.

It was, indeed, to these murderous marauders from the mountains, the pirates of the prairies, that the suffering sire and babe owed their unspeakable agonies.

CHAPTER II.

DESPAIR AND DELIVERANCE.

LOWER and lower sunk the blood-red sun toward the horizon line, and still that strong man remained, in his agony, fast bound upon the plain; and that weak and trembling babe, whose outcries had by this time become but gurgling gasps, racking the wretched father to the very soul.

Many times had the little one sunk in the dust, and then, after resting, had crawled slowly on toward its parent, until its blue eyes could stare into those great wild orbs of his, so expressive of the deepest anguish.

The strong man could not weep; his tear-fountains had burned dry.

Slowly the child crawled, until its little hands were placed upon the father's broad and blistered breast, upon which it fell, with a gasping cry of relief.

The broad breast heaved, as though the brave, stout heart strove to burst forth.

The muscles of the brawny arms became knotty, and writhed like serpents beneath the scorched skin, in an endeavor to tear from the cruel stakes, and clasp his darling one.

But the thongs held firm, and, with a still deeper groan, the struggles of the worse than crucified man ceased, his breath coming and going in faint gasps.

Silent lay the babe, as though dead, and the mental prayer of its father was that the little sufferer's soul might indeed then go out from its frail earthly tenement. For a time, he believed that this was really the case; yet he strove with

all his great power of will, to bear up under his accumulated agony.

There appeared no hope of relief, of rescue; yet, in spite of all this, he still endeavored to hope against hope. He prayed not for death to come to him, and relieve his fearful torture; as almost any man would, under similar circumstances.

And why?

Because he battled against death, for an object that had become, since his capture, the one great thought of his being. Long before he had been bound, and thus left upon the plain, to witness the death of his darling, and then himself to die a lingering death, he had taken an oath of vengeance. And well he might.

No man ever had greater cause to so swear, as the reader will admit, if not at this point in our narrative, most certainly when he has been further informed.

Had one bent low to those cracked and bleeding lips, after the wretched man had decided that his child was dead, the hoarsely whispered words, to which he gave faint utterance would have hinted at still another case of awful cruelty.

He still hoped and pleaded that rescue might come. Such were his whispered words of prayer, drawn from his inmost soul.

"I will not die! I will live—ay, live to save my poor wife from those fiends! Yes, I will live for revenge—I must!"

"Oh God help my poor Marion, and lead me to her rescue! For that, if for naught else, save me from the doom that hangs over me!"

Straight upward, toward the sky, his eyes were directed, and staring as if he beheld, in his imagination, his cherished wife in the clutches of the red demons.

So realistic was the imaginary scene, he made a most herculean effort to spring upward, tossing the still form of his infant from his breast. Then, with a wild shriek, his muscles relaxed, and he lay, limp, mercifully bereft of all sense and suffering.

There, in a death-like stupor, the babe lay where it had fallen, beside its father; the crimson rays of the setting sun casting a sanguine glow upon the pale face of each.

For a while, both parent and child lay as if dead; then as if the decrease in heat and light had begun to influence them, they gradually became in a measure conscious, and at nearly the same time. The eyes of the man suddenly shot open, a strange expression mirrored in their depths; he, evidently, comprehending for the time neither his position nor condition.

The babe, with a piteous cry, rolled over, as if striving to gain its former position upon the breast of its father.

This caused the latter, not only to recover comprehension entirely, but to groan in agony, and to regret most intensely that his baby boy still clung to life and suffering.

It was to the wretched father a most terrible shock. This, too, was followed by another, and one which caused a spasmodic shudder to convulse the frame of the awfully wronged sufferer.

It was the long-drawn howl of the "loafer," the big wolf of the prairie.

Ominous of a fearful doom was that howl. It banished hope, and, for the moment, all thought of revenge.

Lower now swooped the still waiting vultures.

Another and yet another howl shot through the still night air, when the red-jowled buzzards, as if realizing that they were about to be defrauded of their prey, swooped downward so low that even in the dim twilight the tortured man could distinguish their repulsive and gloating eyes.

From side to side he rolled his head, gazing at the gaunt wolves that now pursued a half-circle in the dim light, not fifty feet away.

The sight was more than the father could bear; a terrible cry of anguish rung out, with all the power of the tortured man's lungs, to express his own feelings and to frighten away the horrible birds and brutes—if only for a moment. The expression upon the wretched Texan's face suddenly changed, for hardly had the shriek uttered by him died away on the night air, when, as if in answer, there came from over the prairie the vengeful war-whoop of an Indian, followed by a peculiar yell.

The wolves drew near, filling the air with their unearthly howls.

The agonized man could see that the hungry brutes were about to spring in a body upon him and his child.

He closed his eyes upon, as he believed, the last of this life. But he opened them with a loud cry.

It was a yell of thankful joy. His very life

seemed to go out in the sound, as a fearful din, a perfect pandemonium burst out on the night.

Whoops and yells were heard from human lips, yells and howls from wounded beasts, these last mingled with the reports, in rapid succession, of rifles and revolvers. Over them all could be heard distinctly the gallop of a hard-spurred steed, that snorted with pain and terror.

The long-tortured Texan knew that he and his baby boy were saved.

The transformation was so sudden, so totally unexpected, from the extreme of misery and despair to life and hope, that he again became unconscious, even amid the loud and discordant sounds that filled the gloomy space around him.

CHAPTER III.

THE BORDER HOME.

MENTION has been made of a timbered stream a short distance north from the spot where the tortured Texan was bound to the plain, there to meet death, with this young child, by hunger or thirst; by being torn in pieces by wolves, or trampled into the earth in the next stampede of buffaloes.

This creek was a branch of the Rio Concho, and upon its northern side, some fifteen miles distant from the point at which we have been interested, was located Camp Johnston, a frontier Government post. Some eighteen miles further east from this station, the water of the creek met those of the Rio Concho; and, at the triangular point of timber formed by the meeting of the two streams, was a log-cabin, which was completely hidden from view, and situated at a point which would seem to insure it against discovery by the red roamers of the outer plains.

Of course some war-party might encamp on the opposite bank of the Concho; but, even did the painted marauders from the Apache Mountains take up their position there, the cabin was not within their view, as it was located in a small natural "open," midway between the streams and the outer line of timber, and also at some little distance from the banks of both the river and its tributary.

Drooping moss, dense foliage, and thick undergrowth formed a complete wall and arch around and above the dwelling; yet it was far from being a safe place in which to locate, and was in fact the most westerly dwelling on the border at the time of which we write.

To render such an abode less liable to be discovered by merciless foes, vines had been trailed over the rough log walls, at the sides and ends of the cabin, and even over the roof of rudely-split cedar shingles. A veranda was built along the front, and this also was entirely shaded by the creeping vines.

All in all, it was a cozy and attractive little home, as Marion Munroe had asserted, with the light of joy and happiness in her eyes, and many thanks upon her tongue, when her youthful husband had first brought her there. This was after a long and fatiguing journey from Fort Mason, where he had, while serving as scout and hunter for the post, won this fair daughter of the West for his bride.

They had been a year in their new home at the commencement of our story, and, in that time a bright boy baby had been given them to gladden their hearts and brighten that isolated frontier cabin.

Madison Munroe was a noted scout and ranger and was generally known as "Mad Munroe," from the insane fury that seemed to possess him whenever he was in a fight with the Indians. It was this, more than any desire to abbreviate his real name that gave to our young friend his *sobriquet*.

There were good reasons for his fury and hatred toward the red butchers of the plains, for his parents had been slain and mutilated, and his home burned, when he was but a youth; he himself escaping the fate of his father and mother, only from the fact that he had been, at the time, absent on a fishing excursion.

He had, however, heard the wild war-cries of the savages, and had rushed through the timber, crouching prudently, and indeed providentially, in the undergrowth, when he realized that his death was certain were he discovered by the demons of the Pecos.

From his covert he had witnessed the murder of both his parents and the destruction of his childhood's home; and, although then quite young, he had vowed that he would terribly avenge his dear ones—an oath which he never forgot, as those who served with him could testify.

A kind uncle had sent him to school in San Antonio; but, being naturally apt and remark-

ably intelligent, he remained but a short time in the Alamo City at his studies. Soon he returned to the frontiers, always bearing in mind his oath of vengeance; for he never, for a moment lost sight of the dread scene which he had viewed in anguish from the undergrowth and which was indelibly photographed upon his brain.

It had been in consequence of that vow that young Munroe had adopted the life of a scout and ranger, in preference to the peaceful and retired one that was offered him.

Many scalps from among the Apache and Comanche tribes had he, as trophies of his daring, skill, and bravery, before he had met his fate in the person of Marion St. Clair. Her father was a ranchero near Fort Mason, at the time Madison was in the employ of the commandant of that post.

When the handsome pair were wedded by the chaplain of the old and honorable Eighth Infantry, within the barracks, there had been a most joyous celebration; the Texans from the neighborhood having been present, with their families, and all had been as merry as such occasions should be.

Soon after this, the commanding officer had been ordered to place a detachment of men at Camp Johnston, although that post had been abandoned some time previous. He had also instructions to send out scouting parties, as the hostile tribes had become very troublesome and dangerous to the outer line of ranches.

Thus it had been that Mad Munroe was forced to leave his young and beautiful wife, and to act as guide and scout for this detachment of troops.

But Munroe had, soon after reaching Camp Johnston, resolved that Marion should join him; indeed, the young man felt quite lonely, as well as miserable and unhappy, without her, and he kept a lookout for a safe and suitable location for a home—some point, at which he could build a cabin for his cherished one—for the prospects were that he would be obliged to remain on the upper waters of the Rio Concho and its tributaries, for some length of time.

He did not wish to leave his wife at the camp of the troops, as there had been no women accompanying even the highest rank of officers.

Consequently, as has been said, he kept his eyes open for a safe retreat, some miles from the station; eventually selecting the spot we have mentioned, and there he had erected, to a great extent with his own hands, the log cabin that has been described. The principal assistance rendered him was by an old prairie pard of his known as "Old Rocky," and who will figure in future chapters as a noted scout and Indian-fighter.

When all was complete, in and about the little dwelling, Old Rocky and a friendly Caddo Indian, by the name of Creeping Cat, and of whom we shall know more as we proceed, had insisted upon accompanying him to Fort Mason, to help to guide and guard the young wife to her new home.

Both the old scout and the Caddo had endeavored to dissuade Madison from bringing his bride to such a dangerous locality, but without success; for the young ranger was obstinate, and asserted that his Marion would be just as safe on the Concho as at the fort. He reasoned that it was absurd to entertain a thought of the probability of hostiles discovering the cabin, as the war-trails all led down country, giving Camp Johnston a wide berth.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT.

THE white and the red pard of Mad Munroe had, finally, been forced to agree partially with the young man's reasonings; nevertheless, after they had seen the happy pair settled in their new home, both Old Rocky and Creeping Cat, after holding a "council talk," agreed and resolved that they would bear in mind, when in their prairie wanderings, that it was quite possible for the young wife to be discovered by the savages at any time.

They, therefore, determined that they would visit the cabin, to make sure that all was safe and well with Marion; and they were all the more anxious after the baby boy had been added to the little household.

Madison was compelled to be absent for short scouts only, therefore he was not under the necessity of leaving his wife and child, at the first, alone over night; and, when now and then he was called upon to guide a detachment any great distance, Star Eyes, the squaw of Creeping Cat remained with Marion until the husband of the latter returned.

Old Rocky and his red pard roamed the plains at will, for scalps and vengeance; neither of

them being bound to any man or any body of men. They could not be hired to serve Government or State as scouts or guides, although many a time they performed such service, but simply as volunteers.

Free as the prairie air they breathed they came and went as they saw fit.

Having thus introduced our new characters, and led the reader to a new scene, we proceed, first, however, stating that the tortured captive and his child, who have figured in the foregoing chapters, claiming so much of our sympathy and pity, are, as has probably been inferred, Madison Munroe and his infant son.

In what manner they came to be in such a fearful position together, and other matters pertaining to those we have mentioned, it is now our duty to make known.

First, however, we will state, that the wife of the young scout was very beautiful, and but eighteen years of age. She was the picture of health and happiness at the time we bring her before the notice of the reader, she having had naught to worry or grieve her to any extent, and being without any fear or apprehension from savage foes.

She trusted implicitly in her husband's judgment, and would have braved great danger rather than remain away from him. She loved him deeply and truly, and she perfectly adored her baby boy.

Had she been permitted to penetrate the future, however, she would have been paralyzed with horror; but, providentially for her, as for all of us, in most cases, she knew not what the morrow had in store for her.

It was the evening previous to the day on which the unfortunate scout and his child are brought to our notice, and the same little one is lying in its mother's arms laughing, prattling and enjoying itself, as Marion sat rocking back and forth on the veranda of her vine-embowered and tree-arched cabin home.

She was momentarily expecting to hear the sounds made by the hoofs of her husband's galloping horse on the narrow but well worn trail through the bottom-timber, as he returned down the creek from his duties at Camp Johnston.

Taking into consideration the distance from the settlements, the forest lodge of the Munroes was furnished well, and with neatness; much artistic taste being displayed in the arrangement of the one large room, the walls of which were ornamented in many and various ways with the horns of antelopes and deer, the plumage of beautiful birds, and curious grasses and mosses. And, notwithstanding the fact that Marion Munroe was well aware that their home was in a most dangerous position on the border, she felt that it was secure from discovery, from its complete isolation, and from being at the forks of the streams, where only by accident a foe would be liable to enter.

Had the dwelling been located five miles further up or down the Rio Concho, she would not have dared remain in it a single night; indeed, her husband would not have allowed her to do so. Consequently, it will be seen that the cabin, if but fifty yards over on the opposite side of the river, would have been in danger of discovery at any time, day or night; but the difficulty in fording the river was a great advantage against this.

All this had been explained by young Munroe to his wife, and she had trusted implicitly in his judgment and discretion.

Marion was a beautiful sight, as we now see her. Seated, with her child, between two of the vine-covered posts—this picture, framed in verdure, in the soft, subdued light of the declining sun, and beneath the natural arches of the timber, from which hung long festoons of Spanish moss—she was fair to look upon, and especially so to Madison Munroe to behold upon his return after a hard day's scouting.

A great pity it was that this charming little border home, a very paradise on earth, was destined to be invaded by the red fiends of the Rio Pecos. But so it was.

No happier home could have been conceived of anywhere, and never had the slightest shadow fallen upon the youthful pair, if we except the few brief absences from each other, which could not be avoided, and which, if possible, but increased their love. Happy as a summer's dream had that been, and neither of them had the remotest idea that the blissful dream was to be changed to a most horrible nightmare—that they were doomed to suffer ten thousand deaths, to suffer such mental and physical agony as was almost beyond belief, while their innocent babe was fated also to be tortured to the very door of death!

Had Marion been less happy, and less occu-

plied with pleasant thoughts in connection with the expected return of her loved husband, she might have been gloomily oppressed by the somber shades, the weird, swaying moss, and the ghost-like sigh of the waters as they flowed amid the shore-reeds near at hand.

As the sun sunk lower and lower, more dismal became the view; and one who might have chanced into that "open" would not have dreamed that a habitation of man was within the same until he stumbled upon it.

Still Marion Munroe lingered in her chair, at times listening intently, and gazing wistfully and anxiously toward the undergrowth up the stream, through which she had hoped, ere this time, to have seen her brave and handsome young husband break hastily, upon his favorite steed. Yet he came not.

The babe, with dimpled arms around its mother's neck, and head upon her shoulder, sunk into infantile slumbers.

Clasp close your babe, Marion; for long, ay, even an eternity in seeming, will it be ere again that child reposes thus in your loving arms!

Except the ghostly whispering of the slowly surging and swaying moss above her head, and the equally somber sounds from the rippling waters adjacent to the cabin, the river-bottom was as silent—and had been throughout the entire afternoon—as a tomb; and, to a nervous imagination, it would have seemed oppressive, if not ominous of danger at the least.

But the young wife and mother was accustomed to the solitudes of nature, and it was only the non-appearance of her husband that gave her the least annoyance.

Yet that somber scene was fated to be suddenly transformed from a natural paradise to a pandemonium, and an ill-omened vulture seemed to have been, by the cruel Fates, chosen to give the signal for the terrible change that was coming.

This bird, which had evidently gorged itself from the carcass of some wounded animal, strove to fly from the branch upon which it had been perched, but fell, with a great whisking of foliage and flapping of wings, down, until clear of the same. Then it dropped upon the flower-bespangled sward of the "open," opposite the cabin, and not ten feet from the watching wife on the veranda.

Marion was startled greatly from the suddenness of the unexpected appearance of the fowl bird, and the commotion it had occasioned.

The huge buzzard stood gazing with its repulsive eyes directly at the young woman. It presented a revolting sight, and one that occasioned loathing and aversion; for its beak and feathers were smeared with gore and carrion stains.

Little dreamed Marion Munroe that the fowl bird before her had been the direct means, by its flight and fall, of drawing the attention of a hideous paint-daubed Apache spy to the "open," to the cabin home, and to herself—that the buzzard was destined to be the prime cause of bringing upon her and hers such agony and despair as but few mortals are ever called upon to endure.

So it was, however.

Barely had the bird gained a firm footing upon the sward when, with a crashing of the undergrowth that bordered the "open," there darted out an Apache brave, in all his hideous paraphernalia of war.

As the savage caught sight of the woman and child, a single ejaculation burst from his brutal lips, his astonishment and exultation plainly expressed in it:

"Ugh!"

As this guttural sound reached her, Marion gave a shriek of mortal terror.

CHAPTER V.

MAD MUNROE AND THE MARAUDERS.

THE little cabin home of Madison Munroe appeared to be, at the particular time of which we speak, the central point toward which more parties than one were attracted, and that through some strange and unaccountable influences.

Surely the good and evil Fates were exerting their powers to control the lives of that little household, and to attract toward the bank of the Rio Concho men with both good and evil purpose and intent; which would cause a chain of events the most dreadful and horrible, and bringing misery and anguish upon those in whom we are most interested. What, then, must it have been to endure what we can but faintly describe?

It so happened that an Apache war-party encamped just across the Rio Concho from the cabin of Mad Munroe, and a most trivial inci-

dent led to the discovery of the home of our friends.

One of the braves had, when on the south bank of the river, discovered on the opposite shore a fine fat deer drinking; but it was impossible for the Indian to get a fair shot at the animal with his bow. The savage therefore waited until the buck had satisfied its thirst, and turned about, re-entering the dense undergrowth.

This was not more than a bow-shot below the cabin of our friends.

The Indian at once swam the river, keeping his bow and arrows above the waters, and gained the bank on the other side. He then struck the trail of his game, the animal following a winding path, which forced it to pass near the border of the "open" in which was the home of our friends.

It was when the war-painted brave was speeding along this path in pursuit of the deer, that the commotion caused by the carrion bird attracted his attention; and he sprang through the fringe of bushes, discovering, to his astonishment, and no little exultation, the log-lodge of his white foes, those he so dreaded and detested.

The shriek of poor Marion upon first seeing, to her horror, the hideous Apache, was sufficient to alarm the camp beyond the river; but the savage added his signal whoop which caused fully a score of his brother braves to dash toward and into the stream. This they swam, and then rushed to the assistance of the lone discoverer.

Madison Munroe had been detained at the military station up the creek, for some time after his usual hour; but it so happened that the young scout was sufficiently near his home to hear both the cry of his loved wife, and the signal whoop of the Apache brave.

The heart of the young man sprang to his throat, and he fairly reeled in his saddle, as these sounds, so ominous of worse than death, tore through his startled brain. His bronzed face became ghastly, his teeth snapped together, and his features became stamped with an apprehension and anguish the most terrible.

He soon recovered, however, and dashing deep his spurs, his horse sprang wildly in the air, and then went crashing through the thickets, and down the creek bottom, toward the Rio Concho and that secluded home.

Who could imagine the emotions of the young scout, who knew, from the instant he heard the whoop of the savage, that his home, his wife and innocent baby were doomed!

What was he to do?

Should he dash to the rescue, and in so doing be captured, and given over to a lingering death by torture?

Yet, not for a moment did he consider aught except the danger of those so dear to him.

Well he knew that no single Indian would be far away from his war-party in that section of the country; and that, notwithstanding he had heard the whoop of but one brave, there must be many more within hearing of that awful signal.

Then it was that the young man bitterly cursed the selfishness which had prompted him to bring his darling to that exposed border. Then it was, that he deeply, most deeply regretted not having taken the advice of Old Rocky and Creeping Cat, the friendly Caddo.

But it was now too late.

On, like a projectile from a catapult, shot Mad Munroe on his noble steed—on, to the rescue of those so dear to him, or to die with them!

But a few moments too late was the wretched husband and father.

We must now, however, return to poor Marion.

So appalled was the young wife by the appearance of the hideous savage, that, after springing upward from her chair, and shrieking in terror, she stood as if paralyzed, clasping her babe to her breast.

The poor, terrified woman was unable to move a muscle.

Although reared on the frontiers, Marion now for the first time looked upon a hostile savage; and the horrible Apache's snake-like eyes glittered, as they seemed to pierce her very brain, causing her blood to chill in her veins. She felt that she was lost.

Yet she thought not of herself.

She felt that her babe would be torn from her arms, and brained before her eyes!

She also reasoned that more of the red demons must be near at hand.

If so, her husband would be slain, or, what was worse, captured.

Of her own probable fate, she dared not even for a moment think, lest she should go stark mad.

If Madison was within hearing of her cry, he would gallop to the assistance of herself and child—gallop to his death!

All this came into Marion's mind in an instant, as the repulsive Apache stood glaring at her, like a wild beast previous to pouncing upon its prey.

Then she, as instantly, recovered command of herself, and resolved to act in the defense of her life, and that of her child.

She resolved to bound back into the cabin, clutch a rifle, and shoot the savage!

Could she accomplish this, she believed she might then dash into the dark undergrowth before other Indians arrived, and thus save herself and child. Breathing a prayer for guidance and preservation, Marion acted at once.

But, the very moment she sprang from the veranda through the door, the Apache, with a grunt of surprise and baffled rage, sprang forward, his long scalping-knife clutched firm, and his hideous face contorted with a thirst for blood!

Marion's presence of mind was wonderful, considering her utter mental demoralization but a moment before. Her infant was now awake, and was making outcries of affright, clinging to its mother's neck, as she rushed into the cabin.

The brave woman realized that more than life depended upon a moment's time.

She knew where the rifle hung upon the wall, but it was now growing dark in the cabin, and she could not see the weapon.

She knew, also, that she could do nothing with the babe in her arms; she therefore tore the little hands from her neck, although it wrung her heart to do so.

Quickly she placed the child upon the floor by the wall, and, reaching upward, providentially clutched at once the gun, her one hope. The next moment, she whirled about, with the weapon in her hands, cocked the same, and aimed it at the red foe; but she panted so laboriously, that it threatened to defeat her aim.

Indeed, she perceived at once that to catch the sights would be impossible.

But Marion Munroe had no time to deliberate; for the Apache, with a howl of rage, sprang to the doorway. His eyes were, for the instant, blinded by the darkness, and this forced a halt.

That halt was the salvation of Marion, for it doomed the Indian to death!

Plainly the savage was outlined against the outer light of the "open."

Framed in the doorway was the form of the hideous would-be destroyer, of herself and child, and, without a second's hesitation, Marion leveled the gun, and fired.

A loud report followed, and then a horrible death-yell; as the Apache swayed for a moment, catching at both the door-posts. He then fell, with a sickening sound, upon the floor of rough-hewn logs, the blood spurting from his breast.

Instantly, Marion Munroe cast the friendly weapon with a clang to the floor, caught up her baby, which was crying piteously, and ran to the door. Over the outstretched, repulsive corpse she bounded, with a shudder, and thence across the veranda.

At that moment full half a score of whooping Indians dashed out from the dark shades of the undergrowth on the east side of the "open," and came rushing, with yells of triumph blended with fury, toward the cabin.

Marion had expected them, for, as the death-howl of her victim shot through the cabin and the bottom-timber, she had heard the whoops of the approaching savages, and knew that if she made her escape it would be little less than marvelous.

Her ears, practiced in regard to sounds of every kind, had at once determined that the red demons were quite near her home. No sooner, therefore, did she discover the on-coming whooping braves, than she realized that she and her infant were doomed—that escape was now impossible.

But, filled with horror unspeakable, she ran as she had never run before, shrieking wildly as she went, toward the western margin of the "open."

Just then, a clear, wild, and peculiar yell shot through the dark shades, causing the horde of Apaches to halt suddenly, in amazement not devoid of dread.

And well they might, for few of the war-party were there who had not heard that yell when their brother braves fell fast, in the fierce carnage that always followed it.

It was the wild and well-known whoop of war of Mad Munroe, rendered now ten times more furious, more threatening, and more ominous of death to the red foe by the sounds the scout had heard, which told him but too plainly that his loved ones were in deadly peril, if not already slain.

And Marion, too, heard that well-known signal of dread war, that had made her husband known and feared by all the hostile tribes on the Texas border; but, although she knew full well her awful position, the sound gave her a fresh pang of despair. It shot through her already tortured brain, and nearly took her remaining strength away; for she felt sure now, that not only were herself and little one lost, but her husband also!

Yet, instinctively, she rushed onward.

And, with weapons ready, and taunting and exultant whoops the fierce Apaches followed frantically, joyous at having, as they believed, the squaw and pappoose of their hated enemy, Mad Munroe, in their power!

CHAPTER VI.

FIRE AND SWORD.

NOT only did the savages feel sure of the two helpless captives, but of the husband and father as well; even of the noted and dreaded scout, who had slain so many of their braves.

The next instant a veritable prince of the plains, the buckskin-clad son of the frontiers, with set teeth, and a revolver in either hand, dashed forward upon his magnificent black, but now foam-covered steed, in one mad leap clearing the tops of the undergrowth, and into the open.

Again rung out his wild Texas yell, and then twin spurts of flame lit up the scene, revealing more plainly his impressive mien, as he opened a rattling fusillade; his bullets hurtling through the massed Apaches, who had been dazed, for the moment, by the daring dash of the young scout upon them.

Marion, with her babe clasped to her breast, ran around to the rear of her husband's horse. The eyes of Madison lighted up with relief and great joy even in that mad charge; a time when any moment might be his last on earth. He had seen that his wife and child were, as yet, unharmed.

As her brave and daring husband thus charged recklessly into the very jaws of death, poor Marion Munroe clasped her babe more closely, and stood, with her pale face upturned to heaven, as piteous prayers for their preservation came from her trembling and almost colorless lips.

The scene was too terrible, and she, while shudders convulsed her frame, closed her eyes to shut out the horrors of that awful sight!

But the hellish whoops, the vengeful yells and death-howls, together with the reports of the revolvers, the shrill whistle of bullets and arrows, the wild war-cry of her loved, but as she now felt doomed husband, and the snorting of his steed as its hoofs crashed through the bones of the fallen braves, these sounds seemed to curdle the blood in poor Marion's veins, and filled her with horror indescribable.

It would have been quite possible for her to have escaped, during the excitement of the grand charge made by her husband; she might have gained some dark covert in the dense shades, but she was frozen, as it were, to the spot, and incapable of movement. Besides, she well knew that the man of all men to her was, to all intents and purposes, in the hands of his pitiless foes; and what then, was life to her?

She felt that nothing could save him, and if he lost his life in this gallant effort to save her and their child, she cared not to survive him.

No, life in that case would be an endless torture.

Marion opened her eyes, as a chorus of wild and exultant yells rung out, and echoed fiendishly through the natural arches of the bottom-timber, which now seemed filled with the painted demons.

She was nearly blinded by huge forks of flame which shot up into the moss-drooped trees, and illumined the entire "open," and the dense shades beyond, with a fierce and weird light.

Her cabin home was wrapped in flames!

The sight was terrible, and red fiends in war-paint and flaunting feathers danced madly around the "open."

This cruel light, had at first, blinded poor Marion.

She saw not that which lay upon the ground in front of her, and but a short distance from where she stood.

But, a fascination that was simply ungovernable forced her gaze from the burning cabin

to the spot where she had seen her husband dash in his daring charge—a point directly opposite their now burning home.

Then the poor woman strove to shriek, but only a gasping sound issued from her parched and palsied lips. Her eyes protruded in horror, anguish and dread, the most agonizing, for her gaze was fixed upon the prostrate and blood-stained forms of the black steed and its recent rider—her hero husband!

Yes, Mad Munroe lay still and silent as a corpse, and with nearly a dozen dead and dying Apaches scattered upon the sward of the "open" around him.

Only for an instant did Marion's gaze rest upon this most terrible tableau. Then a red hand was laid roughly upon her shoulder from behind, and as if that touch had stricken her dead, the unhappy woman sunk to the earth, her beautiful face colorless as that of a corpse.

Thus she lay, as devoid of sense as one dead.

Madison Munroe, his wife and child, with his noble steed, all lay, to all appearance, lifeless upon the turf in front of his so recently happy home in the "open."

And the glare of the flames from that cosy cabin, playing upon their forms and faces, and upon the hideous paint-daubed and feather-bedizened fiends of Apacheria as well, lying dead around them, lit up at the same time the repulsive features of the survivors.

These last were now dancing with demoniac glee, with whoop and yell of the maddest triumph, around the fiercely burning home of Mad Munroe.

CHAPTER VII.

RED FIRE AND RED FIENDS.

IT is probable that no man ever suffered greater anguish than did Madison Munroe during his frantic gallop, that headlong and desperate dash toward his home, after he had heard the shriek of his wife, and the signal whoop of the Apache who discovered the cabin and its occupants.

When he heard, the instant after, the report of the rifle, he knew well that his brave wife had attempted a defense of herself and babe. If possible, Mad Munroe loved his Marion more, when he heard that rifle-shot, than ever before.

She had proved herself well worthy to be the chosen one of a prairie ranger, and the heart of the brave young scout, although so overwhelmed with apprehension, swelled with pride for a moment. But, it was to be again tortured by the chorus of whoops which confirmed his worst fears—namely, that a war-party had encamped near his home, and that he and his loved ones were doomed to death.

Then it was, that the insane fury which had made him famous among daring Texans, and feared by the red pirates of the plains, broke out in reality, and made him more of a madman than a sane being.

His spurs were cruelly driven home. Life, and more than life, depended upon one wild plunge of his steed, he well knew.

Headlong darted man and horse, like furies on vengeance bent, as indeed they were.

On, crashing down the bushes in his path, heeding not the whisking branches, and bending low to avoid the huge limbs that threatened death, went the frantic scout.

And that ride was one of excruciating torture to him. The terrific speed of his horse seemed but as the slow progress of a turtle.

He longed to fly—to cut the air with the speed of an arrow!

He leaned forward in his saddle, and, as he drew near the "open," jerked and cocked his trusty "Colts," driving his spurs home into the reeking flanks of his horse. Then, in one great bound, the animal, with a groan that was human-like, cleared the undergrowth, and landed in the "open."

The eastern side, Munroe could see, was full of hideous Apaches.

Red braves were bounding from the thickets each moment.

One lightning-like glance showed him his Marion and their child!

He turned his horse, even at terrific speed, to avoid trampling them to the earth.

Past them he darted, knowing it to be impossible to halt his steed at that great momentum, to clutch his dear ones, and flee.

This was not to be thought of. They would be dead before that could be accomplished.

Well did Madison know that it was not possible for Marion to escape.

He also knew that his own fate was sealed—that his horse was now carrying him into the midst of the mob of Apaches!

Realizing all this in one fitting moment, the scout resolved that death-howls should sound many and fast before the arrows of the savages should pierce his vitals.

He knew that the Indians had recognized him, that they knew his yell of war, and would endeavor to capture him for the torture; even if in so doing they might, in the attempt, lose a number of their force.

The signal-yells of the chief proved this.

Mad Munroe well understood the full significance of every whoop and outcry, every hideous howl of the red foe.

Consequently he sought not to check the speed of his horse, or to guide the animal from its direct course in that headlong and terrific gallop. Right and left he leveled and shot off his revolvers as rapidly as he could pull triggers.

The Apache horde shrunk back, appalled, at that grand and heroic charge. Every plunge of the black steed brought spurts of fire from deadly tubes, and leaden messengers of death.

It was a grand and terrific sight!

That lone avenger, battling with two-score of red warriors of the plains, while whoop, and yell, and howl rung and echoed through the dark shades, and up and down the timber-arched channel of the Rio Concho.

Painted braves, with flaunting feathers and silver trinkets amid their wildly-flowing hair, threw upward their bronzed arms, their weapons held tight in the grip of death; and, with hideous faces terribly contorted, fell as the death-howl shot from their lips, with their latest strength and breath.

Arrows flew, but they were aimed at the black steed only, until as many as a score of feathered shafts projected from the horse's body, neck, and limbs. Blood spurted from as many wounds, over the flowers and grass, and over the ghastly corpses of the red victims of the daring scout, and the writhing wounded.

Brief was that picture, but awful in the extreme.

Then flames shot upward from the cabin, and the noble black horse fell upon the sward; while a dozen Apaches, with exultant whoops, sprung madly upon the desperate young Texan, who hurled his empty and useless revolvers with terrific force at their heads. He then drew his bowie, and fought like a madman until laid low by a blow from a hatchet; when he sunk, blood-stained and senseless, but, strange to say, without one serious wound upon his person.

A perfect bedlam of whoops and howls followed the downfall of the hated, but greatly feared scout.

Nothing would have tempted any one of these Apaches to take the life of their dreaded foe. He had proved himself a great warrior, a chief utterly without fear; and, therefore, he deserved the death of a warrior, and one that would try his fortitude to the utmost.

There was little grief manifested on account of their slain, for not one had been scalped, and this would give the dead the *entree* into the beautiful valley beyond the moon, where, as the Apache believes, the "grass is ever green, the rivers never run dry, game is plentiful, and the mustangs fleet as the wind"—an Indian ideal Heaven.

The Apaches were overjoyed, indeed they were in a perfect frenzy of delight; for they were on their return from a successful raid upon the lower settlements of the Rio Llano and San Saba, and they had now secured a captive whom they had, for years, sought to slay or capture.

Besides this, they had also his squaw and pappoose, and his home had been pillaged and burned.

All this was within less than an hour's gallop of Camp Johnston, where a force of "long-knives" (cavalry) were then awaiting a favorable season to invade their hunting-grounds, and guided by this very scout whom they had taken, Mad Munroe.

This was, indeed, a great success for the red marauders; and they danced before the blazing home of their victims, yelling like fiends. First, however, they bound the much-feared Texan, who had been deemed "Big Medicine," that is, one who had proved himself almost invincible.

A couple of young braves made sure that Marion could not escape, but she fainted as the hand of one was placed upon her shoulder.

She was then bound, and one of the red demons was about to dash out the brains of the child against a tree, when the chief, Red Wolf, interfered, giving such orders as to the infant as appeared satisfactory to his principal warriors.

Marion was placed near her husband, and the child by her side; a brave being detailed to

guard them, although the scout and his wife still remained unconscious.

Then the plunder from the cabin was conveyed over the Rio Concho, on a raft of driftwood collected for the purpose; as were also the captives soon after, and the corpses of the slain. This removal was quickly accomplished, for the savages feared that the glow of the conflagration would be observed at Camp Johnston; and, in that case, a detachment of troops would at once be dispatched down the creek, to investigate.

The captives were placed, bound, upon the ground in the Apache camp, and immediate steps were taken for a night march, to avoid being attacked by the "long-knives."

Madison and Marion soon recovered their senses, both regretting they had not been slain, when they realized their awful position, and beheld the exultant fiends flitting past in the light of their camp-fires, bearing their slain into the shades for burial, and preparing for the march.

The scout knew but too well the terrible fate that was in store for him, but he thought only of his poor wife and child; the probable doom of Marion, rendering him almost insane at the thought of it.

He had been surprised, upon regaining consciousness, to hear the feeble cries of his baby boy. He had believed that the child would have been slain at once, as was usual with Indians when on the war-path.

Infants, and even larger children, were always brained, as their crying would betray the captors to pursuers.

Had Munroe known the hellish plan the chief had conceived in connection with the little one, his agony of mind would have been increased; although this seemed impossible in the condition in which he found himself.

Marion had, at first, upon recovering her senses, been overjoyed on beholding her husband alive, and not seriously injured; but the hopeless anguish that was stamped upon his face, mingled with the strange look of agonized pity in his eyes, caused the poor young wife to regret, the next moment, that either of them had been spared, to regret that they, and their babe as well, had not been slain at once.

Death would have relieved them from the awful misery in prospect, and from which there seemed no avenue of escape.

So dread were the surroundings, and so utterly hopeless their position, that neither could speak to the other, although their eyes spoke volumes.

Madison Munroe did not believe the glare of the blazing cabin would be noticed from Camp Johnston, on account of the towering timber to the east of the post; or, if it was, that the guard would report the same, as frequently fires raged on the prairies, and were unnoticed. Consequently, there was little hope of aid from the troops until it would be too late.

His failure to report on the coming morning, to guide a scouting-party up the country, would awaken suspicion in regard to the safety of himself and family, and the commandant would doubtless send a soldier to ascertain the cause of his absence. But that would little avail them.

By that time the Apaches would be too far away to be overtaken; or their trail, if they proceeded westward, to the south of the stream, would be obliterated by the herds of buffalo. Altogether there were but slight grounds upon which to base a hope of rescue; or, if this were attempted by the soldiers, the Indians would at once put himself and his loved ones to death.

Mad Munroe could only by a superhuman effort, suppress groans of despair. But this was not on his own account.

The probable fate of his wife was to him so terrible even to think of, that he could scarce keep from shrieking out in his mental agony. And then came the thought of his innocent child, and the inhuman tortures to which the merciless fiends would, in all probability, subject it.

His one hope was now that the babe would screech and cry, to the extent of infuriating the savages and causing them to brain it at once, thus putting it beyond the lingering death which might otherwise be in store for it.

It was a wonder that poor Marion retained her senses during the preparations of the red demons for the march; for she must have expected each instant that her husband and child would be slain before her eyes and she herself reserved for a far worse fate. But the poor woman bore all with remarkable fortitude, and so hasty were the preparations for departure that the captives were not taunted or molested by the savages in any way.

The sun had now sunk below the horizon, and the line of march was taken up by moonlight.

Munroe was rudely thrown astride a mustang and bound fast to the animal, amid the jeers of the wild horde; but he spoke not a word, he uttered no complaint. This so infuriated his captors, that they clutched Marion by the arms, and dragged her over the ground to the horse upon which she was to be bound, flinging her roughly upon the beast, and causing her great pain as they secured the thongs about her delicate limbs. While this was going on, another savage held the child by one of its legs, head downward; the little one crying with pain and fright as the mother was being bound upon the mustang.

Mad Munroe fairly foamed at the mouth. He ground his teeth with fury, and his eyes flashed with a murderous light while he writhed and made the most herculean efforts to break free.

"Dogs! Coyotes! Cowards!" he yelled. "Unloose me, and I'll fight the whole pack of you! Apaches are squaws, and dare not fight men."

"The wolves of the Pecos should wear petticoats and not go on the war-path. They can only fight women and children."

"I spit upon you! The death-howls of your braves are music in my ears, and Apache scalps hung thick in my log lodge before you burned it to the ground."

"Bad Medicine will be on your trail, for you have burned the scalps of many braves who were high in the councils of your tribe of coyote whelps."

"Mad Munroe will hear your death-howls before he dies. You cannot kill me. The Great Spirit will send the 'long-knives' on your trail. I have spoken. My talk is done."

The scout shot out these words with a threatening and furious manner, and so grand and daring, so reckless and impressive was he, that, in their superstition, they began to fear that ill-luck would follow them for having burned the lodge and the scalps of their braves.

The chief was furious with his warriors for not having more thoroughly inspected the cabin before setting it on fire. They might then have discovered the scalps and buried them with the slain, who could then have borne them on the "long dark trail," to give joy to those who were forced to linger thereon from having been deprived of that without which they could not pass into the "happy valley."

No further indignities were offered to the captives, the Apaches seemed to have forebodings of danger, on account of the scalps having been burned through their own means.

The hideous horde set out from their camp in a long and serpentine line; the captives being separated, Munroe in the front and blindfolded, and Marion with her child at some distance in the rear.

On through the night they went, following the timber of the Rio Concho for some miles. Then they forded the stream and struck westerly, over the broad prairies, toward the great buffalo-range.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARTING ON THE PLAINS.

Who could, even in a slight degree, imagine the anguish of Madison Munroe when he beheld his loved wife dragged along the ground, and then bound upon the back of a mustang by the brutal savages? And how intensely must his whole nature have been tortured upon beholding his little innocent baby boy, carried by a hideous red fiend who had clutched the child by one leg and, amid screams and shrieks from the little one, tossed it across the lap of its captive mother.

Poor Marion's face was convulsed with the most soul-deep agonized emotions, which were beyond anything like mere expression; and, as for her terribly anguished husband, after his mad and fruitless effort to burst his bonds, he had sat his horse in silence, trembling from head to foot.

The one violent show of emotion manifested by their captive caused the savages the most joyous glee, and perhaps gave to the chief, Red Wolf, an idea of the manner in which he could cause the greatest torture to the young Texan; which was afterward acted upon, as will be shown.

When the capture had first been made, the Apache chief had resolved that he would spare the life of the white squaw—that Marion should be his slave—consequently he could not use her in his proposed torture of the young scout.

But Heaven knows the plan he had concocted in his depraved brain was more than sufficiently torturing, without adding another pang through the wife to the husband, more than the thoughts of that wife's own probable doom.

None but the most miserable and bloodthirsty of savage brutes would have thought of the devilish plan that had been decided upon by Red Wolf.

The condition and situation of our friends, previous to the start on that night march, had been far too terrible for words.

Had the scout been alone in his captivity, he would have borne all with fortitude, and returned taunt for taunt.

That the man who had so often proved himself as brave and daring as was possible, should thus exhibit emotion so strongly in connection with his squaw and pappoose, surprised, even astonished, the Apaches. It caused them to look upon him, for the first time, with something like contempt.

Yet, his gallant and reckless charge was fresh in their minds, and all agreed that, notwithstanding his show of squaw-like weakness since then, he was well worthy to die the death of a warrior—that is, a death of prolonged anguish and agonizing torture. This the chief decided was his due.

When the war-party had proceeded on the march, the captive scout had been blindfolded and placed at some distance in the line of braves from his wife and child; and this, as the Indians knew, would torture him greatly, for he would be ignorant of the whereabouts of his wife, or her fate during his forced ride.

And, all through that long gallop over the moonlit plains, after having crossed the Rio Concho, the husband and father was racked to the very soul in regard to his dear ones.

Even during the time that the war-party encamped in the timber of the creek on the following day, west of Camp Johnston, even then the mother and child were kept from poor Madison's view.

The object of the savages in this, was most fiendish in conception.

They intended to allow the young scout to see his wife only when the time came for them to be parted forever.

Marion, however, was aware that her husband was in the line of warriors, and this was some consolation to the poor woman.

Her sufferings, though terrible, would have been more excruciating had she known the happenings, which were only too soon to cause the misery and despair she then experienced to be happiness in comparison.

When the sun was high in the heavens, in fact, at the hour of mid-day, then the war-party once more equipped their mustangs, secured their captives as before, and struck out from the cool shades upon the open plain, down upon which the sun shone with a heat that was most intense.

When the horde had gained some distance from the line of timber, far out on the bald and barren plain, a signal yell burst from Red Wolf, and at once the horses upon which the captives were bound, were led forward together beside the chief; the war-party forming a wide circle, as they sat upon their wild-eyed mustangs, and presenting a horrible picture of savage life.

At a motion of Red Wolf's hand, the two braves, who had led the horses of the captives, and who still held the animals, secured the heads of the mustangs together, and then cut the thongs which bound Mad Munroe to the beast he bestrode. They then jerked the unfortunate man roughly to the ground, upon which he fell with a heavy thud.

Marion gave a cry of agony, which caused an ejaculation of joyous exultation to break from Red Wolf's lips, and a groan of mortal anguish from Madison, who was confident that a halt had been made to torture him to death, and that before the eyes of his wife; for he now knew that she was near at hand, and not slain as he had once thought possible.

He had expected torture when the Apaches had encamped at the creek, but now he knew well, from the short distance traveled since then, and from his being cut free from the mustang that his time had come. Yet the fate of his helpless wife and child was still uppermost in his mind.

He knew but too well the character of the inhuman monster, and was confident that poor Marion would be reserved for a still sadder fate.

He had heard one outcry from their infant, and that had shot through his brain like an arrow. Up to that time, he had hoped that the little one was slain, and was beyond suffering. He could not believe that the brutes would allow the babe to be retained by its mother.

Too soon was he to know the awful fate to which the child was doomed.

They were now out upon the open plain, and the savages would not linger there, in the intense heat, for any length of time. Besides, they were exposing themselves to discovery, by wandering soldiers and hunters from Camp Johnston.

Thus reasoned Mad Munroe, and a suspicion of the terrible fate that awaited him flashed through his mind. The wonder was that his brain was capable of reasonable thought.

But he was not to be left long in suspense.

His suspicions were confirmed, even before the buckskin bandage was removed from his eyes; for, close beside him, stakes were being driven into the ground.

Marion gazed, with a wild and agonized stare, upon the fettered form of one who was dearer to her than life itself. She had no idea why the stakes were being driven, but she was soon to know.

Her agony of mind was now too intense for tears.

There was a half-insane, a hopeless look in her beautiful eyes, that would have melted a heart of stone, but the red fiends were simply heartless.

At length the stakes were driven deep into the earth, projecting but a few inches from the surface of the plain. Every stroke upon them had seemed to Madison Munroe to have fallen upon his skull; and had it not been for his dear ones, he would have wished it so in reality.

Although there were not the faintest grounds for hope, the strong man had not entirely given up to despair, except at fitting moments. When the work was completed, the two braves again clutched Munroe, this time by feet and arms, and hurled him roughly between the projecting stakes.

Then they secured strong bands of buffalo-skin, one to each wrist and ankle.

Their doing this before cutting the thongs that bound the legs and arms together, proved that they feared the scout would, stiffened though he must be, throw himself upon them.

Another proof there was of this fear, for three more braves were signaled, thus giving one to each strip of buffalo-skin, which each held taut, and ready to pull and wind about the stake, one of them being stationed at each of these.

Mad Munroe was evidently a dangerous man in the estimation of his captors.

The secret of the stakes was no longer a secret to poor Marion. She bowed her fair young head over her baby, and groaned aloud.

The fifth brave drew his scalping-knife across the thongs that bound the wrists and ankles of the captive fast together, and, at that moment, the latter, gathering all his strength, sprang upward, the bandage still over his face. And, although the remaining four braves jerked quick and hard at each strap, they were all hurled right and left; as was also the fifth, who would have buried his knife in the scout's breast but for a signal from Red Wolf for him to desist.

The chief then summoned half a dozen more warriors to assist in securing Mad Munroe to the stakes.

The powerful young man and the five braves had now become mingled in a writhing, struggling mass; the fists of the enraged Munroe being driven, with sledge-hammer force, in every direction. Two of the Apaches were knocked senseless, and murmurs of admiration came from those of the war-party who were seated upon their mustangs.

Such an exhibition of strength and daring caused the savages to respect and admire their captive, as a warrior; and the death that awaited him was, in their judgment, most befitting.

The six braves now sprang upon Munroe, and he was hurled upon his back between the stakes; his limbs being drawn to a torturing tension toward the stakes, and the thongs securely tied to them.

Thus, outstretched upon the ground, lay Madison Munroe, who knew that there he must die unless discovered and released by white friends, which was, to say the very least, highly improbable.

Then, and not until then, was the buckskin bandage removed from his eyes, and Madison looked upon his wife and child!

Who can picture his emotions?

None but heartless demons could have seen them thus, and not have restored them to each other.

Now came another signal from the chief.

Then the child was taken away from the mother, who sat speechless.

Mad Munroe panted painfully from his recent violent exertions.

The cries of the infant were agonizing to the hearts of both the parents.

It was then cast down beside the father, and the braves sprung to their mustangs and remounted.

"Oh, Marion! My wife!" exclaimed the wretched man; "we shall never meet again. Our child and I must die here!"

His voice was hoarse and unnatural. The mere sound of it was heartrending.

The unhappy woman gave one loud and bitter cry, but the inhuman fiends forced her mustang away in haste, as shriek upon shriek burst from her lips for a few moments. Then silence reigned, except the sounds made by the horses' hoofs upon the hard trampled plain, as the hideous horde sped toward Apacheria.

Poor Marion had been mercifully deprived of all consciousness.

But who can imagine her state of mind, after regaining her senses, and recalling the near past, upon finding herself alone, and in the power of the monsters of the Apache mountains?

And Mad Munroe, and that helpless babe were left as we have seen, to die of hunger, and thirst, and torturing heat; unless, in mercy, they might be trampled to death by some herd of bison on a stampede.

CHAPTER IX.

OLD ROCKY.

ABOUT the same time that Mad Munroe started from Camp Johnston, to gallop down the creek to his cabin home, a horseman might have been seen riding over the prairie that stretched south east of the Concho. It was evident that he was aiming to strike the latter river at a point some five miles north of the cabin at the confluence of the creek and the Concho.

This equestrian was a man of some fifty years of age, with deeply bronzed and wrinkled face. His hair, long and black, was sprinkled with gray. He was of medium stature, and thin in flesh, but evidently of iron muscles; and his agility in the saddle was remarkable, for he was constantly turning, with the greatest rapidity, from one side to the other.

His keen dark blue eyes seemed to pierce the dense shades ahead, while he nervously ejected tobacco-juice from his mouth at short intervals, afar over the flowers and grass, as he chewed the weed in the most vigorous manner.

He was attired in buckskin breeches, rent and much camp-stained, as was also his blue woolen shirt, the wide collar of which, being loosely turned back from his neck, displayed a skin that was tanned as dark almost as that of an Indian. His wide-brimmed sombrero of black felt was jammed carelessly on the back of his head, the hat having the appearance of being occasionally used to wipe out his frying-pan, and fan his camp-fire.

His eyes were deep-set, the brows overhanging, his nose thin with flexible nostrils; and a sparse beard, that matched his hair in color and texture, partly concealed his chin and lips. These, had they been clean shaved, would have revealed an iron firmness of will, and a most indomitable spirit.

Any one versed in reading character would at once have decided that this old prairie roamer—as he would undoubtedly be judged to be—was a true and honest man—one who could be depended upon to the death in a good cause.

And this was true to the letter, for the old scout and ranger whom we now introduce is none other than "Old Rocky," one of the most celebrated Indian-fighters, and rangers of the plains of the great Southwest, a quarter of a century ago, and since that time.

Old Rocky was mounted upon a strongly-built and long-limbed horse, with large, intelligent eyes, like those of his master, and which seemed to be continually on the watch for danger.

The animal was not remarkable for beauty any more than was its rider, but appeared well marked for speed and endurance, and was indeed most reliable in these respects. Had this not been the case, the old scout would not have been riding him on that most dangerous portion of the Texas border, where, at any moment, the life of the plain ranger might depend upon the fleetness and strength of his steed.

Old Rocky was not in a hurry, as was very evident, for he did not use spur, and his bridle-reins hung loosely over the horn of the saddle. His arms consisted of a five-chambered Colt's carbine, that carried a conical ounce bullet; a pair of heavy revolvers of the same manufacture, and a huge bowie knife.

His bullet-pouch, belt, and bridle-reins, his

saddle, and the outer seams of his breeches were trimmed with scalps.

On the cantle of his saddle was the usual outfit for camping, and the entire equipments bespoke the old frontiersman, always ready for any emergency or danger.

It has been before mentioned, that this scout and a friendly Caddo Indian, called Creeping Cat, were pals of Mad Munroe and that they had both been filled with no little concern since the young man had brought his wife to the Rio Concho.

These two had mutually agreed that they would, at times, visit the cabin to make sure that all was well with Marion; and since the birth of the child, their visits had been more frequent, the beautiful wife of Madison having won the warm friendship of both these men. Indeed, either of them would, without hesitation, have braved death to serve her.

At the time at which we introduce Old Rocky, he was on his way to meet his red pard, according to a prearranged plan, and both were to ride up the Concho on the day following and satisfy themselves that the Munroe family were safe, as well as to carry some game to Marion. The time of meeting had, however, been appointed for the following morning, and the old scout was, consequently, somewhat ahead of his time.

Had their appointment been one day earlier, that is, on the morning of the day on which we meet Old Rocky, the incidents already recorded would have been less harrowing by far. But such was not to be.

To any one acquainted with the old scout, it would have been at once apparent that he was very much out of sorts.

Possibly he had a presentiment of the occurrences, so horrible, that were on the eve of taking place at the cabin of his friends.

Doubtless he regretted having promised to meet the Caddo, and would have preferred to continue his journey up the river that very night; but he would, even then, have arrived too late to be of any service to his friends.

The expression upon his honest sun and fire tanned face as he gazed wistfully and anxiously up along the Rio Concho, indicated the emotions we have mentioned. Had he been gifted with the sight of the buzzard, and the wings of that bird as well, he could, by a short flight upward, have seen, afar to the south, a horde of Apache braves—a war-party—just as near to the timbered bottom of the Concho as he himself was, and headed for the same at a point within an arrow's flight of the cabin of Mad Munroe, but on the opposite side of the river.

But the old ranger was not agonized by this view, and, even had he been, the knowledge would not have enabled him to reach the home of his friends in time to have been any assistance to those so much in need of it.

Had his horse not been greatly fatigued by a long day's travel beneath the hot sun, he might have left "sign," and token of his presence for the Caddo, and followed the dictates of his mind by proceeding up the shades of the river to the cabin; but, instead, he advanced directly to the bottom-timber, and, entering the same, soon reached a small "open," which was grass-grown and near to the river.

The horse tore off the heads of the rank wild rye with avidity even before the bridle had been removed. But the scout manifested no fatigue, although he had been all day in the saddle. He quickly dismounted, and divested his steed of the equipments; speaking to the animal in the same manner that he would to a human being.

"Lively Legs, old pard, we-uns air all hunk now—dang my dorgs ef we isn't! Hyer's a hefty mess o' slam-up feed fer yer, an' ther river air jist whisperin' fer yer ter come an' take a drink."

"I jist asservates thet I'm ready ter j'ine yer, an' eager ter chaw grub. Ther Caddo won't creep this-a-ways 'fcre sun-up, I reckon, but I allers make it a pint ter 'rove a leetle before ther time 'greed on."

"Dang an' double dang my ole heart ef I ain't been feelin' billious ever since I friz my peepers onter the Concho timber! But I sw'ar I doesn't know why. I hes felt ther perzact way afore, an' I allers noticed thet thar war a heap o' hellishness spattered 'round loose a few fleetin' periods arter."

"I hopes thar ain't nothin' crooked goin' on up ther drink, an' hit doesn't 'pear es though harm c'u'd come ter Mad Munroe's purty caliker an' leetle one quite so speedy; but yer can't jist allers tell when a "nor'ther's" goin' ter rip up things eend-ways, an' freeze yer marrer-bones."

"Howsomdever I allers noticed hit giner'ly strikes a pilgrim when he's nigh er most wilted

wi' warm, an' hev jist washed his blankets an' hung 'em out ter dry.

"Thet's 'bout how things run on this hyer ball o' dirt, Lively-Legs; hellishness bein' sifted outer us pore critters when we-uns air ther leastest perpaired fer it. Wa-al, let's git an' take a drink; then yer kin skupo in ther wile rye, an' snooze deep ter-night, fer I'll chaw bugs fer ther nex' six moons of thar ain't goin' ter be a raal ole he double distilled dangnation shoved outer either we-uns, er some o' our pards, afore two suns glides 'cross ther sky!

"I smells 'Paches, an' I'll bet high thar's a hefty crap o' ha'r fer me an' Creepin' Cat ter harvest, within two days' trot o' ther Concho. The sun air chuck-full o' bleed ter-night. I wisht ther Caddo would 'rove hyer-a-ways 'fore soon. I ain't giner'ly lonesome, but ter-night I air feelin' peaked, fer a fact."

While the scout was speaking, "Lively-Legs" had, with neck-rope trailing, succeeded in reaching a point on the bank, from which the horse could satisfy his thirst. Then the animal had returned, to crop the grass, with evident satisfaction; at times, however, tossing up his head, and gazing, with jaws filled with hanging grass, at Old Rocky, as if pondering more deeply, or listening more intently to some particular portion of his master's remark.

The old scout had busied himself gathering dry fagots and lighting his camp-fire; then, unpacking his *malettos*, or saddle-bags, he proceeded to prepare his frugal prairie meal. But, as with the horse, the man also, at times, stood silent and motionless, listening intently, to detect any unusual or suspicious sounds, which might indicate the presence of danger, while the keen eyes of both scanned the shades on all sides.

Old Rocky depended greatly upon the instincts of his equine pard, the latter seeming often, in their wanderings, to be aware of the approach of danger, whether it was from wild beasts or wilder red-men. And the noble animal would never fail to warn his master, whether sleeping or waking.

Old Rocky, having prepared his supper, partook of it with great gusto, washing the solids down with a liberal supply of strong coffee—the prairieman's favorite beverage—sufficient, indeed, to have served several men in civilized haunts.

This done, the old scout trampled out his fire, first having lighted his corn-cob pipe. He then seated himself beside the margin of the "open," upon his saddle, having spread his blankets within an adjacent thicket.

He smoked silently, enjoying himself hugely after his hearty meal by resting, and puffing at his pipe—his solace in the solitudes.

Naught but the noise made by Lively-Legs, as the horse cropped the rank grass from the sod, the ripple of the river near at hand, and the occasional shriek of a panther or hoot of an owl, was to be heard, if we except the usual dreamy and continuous hum and buzz of the insects of the night, that swarmed amid the bottom-timber.

For quite an hour the old man sat thus, without speech or motion, darkness ruling the timber and thickets; but the round silver moon illumined the greater portion of the "open" before him.

Suddenly, however, a bird-like whistle sounded from beyond the Rio Concho.

The head of Lively-Legs shot upward quickly, with a low snort, and Old Rocky sprung to his feet as if he had received a shock from an electric battery; while, at the same instant, he cried out in a low voice of mingled surprise and joy:

"Dang my dorgs ef thar ain't ther Caddo, es sure es shootin'! Perforate my pericardium, an' stop my futur' peregrinatin' ther perrarers ef Ole Rock ain't particular plum-up chuck-full o' pure glad!

"Jerusalem, an' Jerry-Coe counted in ef me an' my red pard won't everlastin'ly pop powder, ef ther condemned 'Paches air rampagin' 'round permiscus-like, es me an' Lively-Legs hev bin incernated ter s'pose."

"Say, Lively-Legs, Creepin' Cat air come! Gi'n us yer paw, ole pard, fer a shake!"

With these words, the scout sprung to his horse's side, extending his hand within which the animal quickly placed his hoof.

"I'll do ther grip, Lively-Legs," he continued, "fer I'm jist bilin' over wi' pure glad, an' ther old bilyusness what war gettin' on top begins ter levant right off; an' all on 'count o' ther Caddo 'rovin' head o' time. I'll whistle ther family tergether."

And, suiting the action to the word, Old Rocky gave an answering signal.

CHAPTER X.

CREEPING CAT, THE CADDO.

No sooner had the signal of Old Rocky sounded, than there followed a heavy splashing of water as if two large animals had plunged, one after the other, into the stream.

The old scout manifested great surprise and curiosity in the expression of his countenance, he having stationed himself in the middle of the "open," with sombrero in hand. He tore off a huge quid of "nigger-head," in the joy he felt at the arrival of one who, although an Indian, he respected and admired as a brave and true man, and a prairie pard.

Old Rocky had expected the Caddo to come alone, but the sounds seemed to indicate that he had a companion of some kind.

He was not, however, kept long in suspense.

Soon was heard the noise made by animals climbing up the difficult bank, and then the hard tramp of hoofs, and the whisking of bush and branch.

Lively-Legs had ceased feeding from the moment the signal of the Caddo had sounded, and the horse now walked to the side of his master, and there stood, facing the river; expressing by gaze and position, as much of interest and curiosity as old Rocky himself.

The sounds of approach drew nearer and, in a few moments the head of a black horse, with large and brilliant eyes of the same hue, and long slender ears that pointed forward, broke through the foliage bordering the "open," the head remaining stationary a moment or two, framed in dark green, as it gave a low "whinny," which, however, could not have been heard fifty paces distant.

Lively-Legs gave an answering neigh, just as low as the other; both animals seeming to know that it would be imprudent to give vent to greetings in a louder manner. It was evident that they recognized each other—that they had before been associated together.

Only momentary was the halt of the black steed. Then, with a bound, it sprung from the bushes; revealing its whole glossy and graceful proportions, an animal of remarkable beauty.

And, astride, was a plumed and painted Indian.

But, instantly, the red-man alighted, the horse trotting up beside Lively-Legs; both the beasts rubbing their muzzles affectionately together.

Straight as a mount-sheltered pine stood the son of the forest, with arms folded across his broad breast, which was bare and pigment-striped. Three eagle-feathers flaunted from his proud head, while his long black hair hung below his belt behind him in several heavy braids. Into these were woven shells, the teeth of wild beasts, and small silver trinkets that glittered in the moonlight.

Stripes of vermilion, black pigment, and bars of white gypsum—the last lending him a ghastly appearance that was almost hideous. Delicate lines of yellow ocher and vermilion ran beneath his eyes, which were black and piercing.

His features were more Caucasian in cast than like those of the ordinary American Indian; his nose being sharp and his lip thin, while a noble and commanding mien gave him an appearance that would have attracted the attention of any one of the least artistic taste.

He was naked to the belt, which sustained a revolver and scalping-knife. He wore buckskin leggings, and a breech-cloth of bright colors. His feet were unusually small for an Indian, having high insteps, and were incased in beaded moccasins.

Strapped to his back were a carbine and a quiver of arrows, with a short bow; the quiver, belt, and leggings being profusely fringed with scalp of coarse black hair—all, as was plain, from the heads of Indians hostile to his tribe.

"Creeping Cat has come. His heart is glad, for he has found his white brother."

Thus he spoke.

Old Rocky extended his hand, which was pressed to the painted breast of the Caddo; the scout imitating the act, which was a token of peace and brotherhood on the prairies.

"I'm ormighty chuck-full o' pure glad, XXX glad, ter git a peep et yer purty pictur', an' a grip et yer paw. Yer hes 'roved a leetle ahead o' time, es this hyer ole rawhide ripper did hisself."

"What's bin buzzin' big up-country? Anythin' fresh? Air everythin' glidin' smooth es honey down a b'ar's throat, er air matters sorter mixed an' crooked?"

"Comanche hunt buffalo. No go on war-path. Has my white brother crossed Apache trails?"

"Nary a 'Pache moccason track hev I see'd, er Pecos mustang's huff-mark either. Why?

Did yer 'spect I tore ha'r since we-uns gripped paws, an' p'inted two ways?"

The Caddo seemed not to notice the last words of his white pard, but quickly asked, with more earnestness than the chief usually manifested, causing some surprise not devoid of anxiety:

"Has Old Rocky seen our white friends, up the Concho waters?"

"No," was the reply. "How c'u'd I, bein' es I jist 'roved from down-country? Why? Has yer heerd o' anythin' happenin' 'em?"

"Did my white brother not see fire up Concho, after sun go sleep?"

"Nary fire, Caddo. What in thunderation air yer hintin' at? Spit it out speedy! What hev yer see'd, an' who war with yer when yer struck ther drink over yunder?"

The last question was answered without words from the chief, for a beautiful Indian squaw, who had remained seated upon her horse within the bushes until that moment, now caused her mustang to bound into the moonlit "open," and up by the side of the red and white pards.

Old Rocky's face expressed the greatest astonishment mingled with pleasure, and he put out his brawny hand to the squaw quickly, as he exclaimed:

"Dang my dorgs, an' my gran'marm's cats counted in! Ef hyer ain't Star Eyes, I'll chaw snakes an' buzzard-meat fer a power o' periods. Jumpin' Jerusalem! But yer did gi'n ther ole man a start."

"I thort my guardeen angel hed come ter whisper inter my years, thet hit war time fer Ole Rock, ter pass in his chips, quit harvestin' ha'r, an' skip et stompede speed fer kingdom come; fer I've bin bilyus since ther sun war chuck-up strait."

"Air yer on ther war-path, Star Eyes, with Creepin' Cat?"

The appearance so sudden and unexpected, of the attractive young squaw, although the scout suspected that the Caddo had company, banished from Old Rocky's mind the important allusion that had been made to the fire upstream.

And the old man was excusable, for Star Eyes was a perfect bronzed Venus, and very light and roseate bronze at that. A coronet of flowers, of bright hues, circled her well-shaped head, from which depended a wealth of ebony tresses, which were braided in an artistic manner.

She was, indeed, a fitting mate for the Apollo-like Caddo chief.

Her bodice and short skirt, as also her leggins and moccasins, were of the finest fawnskin, richly ornamented with bead-work, porcupine quills, and other curious trinkets, while silver bands were worn around her arms and ankles.

She was mounted upon one of those parti-colored mustangs, called in Texas a "paint," and in Mexico a "pinto"—both words having the same signification.

Her equipments were of the finest, and she was armed with bow, arrows and revolver, as well as with a knife; all of which weapons were highly ornamented.

The chief was evidently proud of his squaw, and loved her dearly; but his face expressed no hing of this. Indeed there was a slight look of surprise in his gaze, as Old Rocky changed so suddenly, from having been deeply impressed and interested in connection with the fire spoken of as having been seen up the river, to an extravagant manifestation of joy at the arrival of the young squaw.

The faintest of smiles wreathed the ruby lips of the Indian woman at the old scout's question, together with his somewhat comical look and perhaps too plainly expressed admiration, both in words and manner.

"Creeping Cat has put on war-paint," she answered; "but the cheeks of the Star Eyes are as the Great Spirit has paired them."

"My chief wished Star Eyes to go and see the squaw of Mad Munroe. Star Eyes is on her way."

"An' I'm ormighty glad ye're goin'—dang my dorgs ef I ain't!" returned Old Rocky, with animation. "This hyer'll be a purty leetle party. Cuss my cats ef hit won't!"

"An' I'm hankerin' for sun-up, so we kin perceed ter peramberlate, er propel; I doesn't 'zactly know which way to put hit."

"My white brother has forgot," put in the chief. "Creeping Cat has seen fire. It points to the stars. It was where the log-lodge of Mad Munroe stands."

"It is far, but a Caddo's eyes are sharp. Creeping Cat will not say Apaches on Concho, but he will not camp when he thinks danger at lodge of Mad Munroe."

"Wa'al, I'll jist sw'ar ter Jerry-Coe!" burst out Old Rocky in astonishment and concern; "why in thunderation and dangnation, didn't yer spit ther hull biz out brash, es I axed yer, Caddo? Yer nigh flustercate me."

"I shell git chuck-full o' ole he hyderphobic mad. I tole yer I'd bin bilyus—I allers air when thar's somethin' rotten or ramshus 'mong my frien's. Dang my dorgs, but yer hes set me back hefty!"

"Ain't hit ther perrarer beyunt ther cabin, what's burnin'? Dang hit, I shell b'ile over! My nag's nigh broke up, but I swan ter Christy, Lively-Legs hev gut ter skip up ther drink speedy, ef thar's any suspish' o' crookedness er 'Pache cussedness!"

"I'm humpin' myself now, yer jist kin bet. Hyer, old pard,"—to his horse—"glide air ther word; er yer kin take yer ch'ice outen skute, levant, perceed, dust out, stompede, er git up an' git! whichever 'pears most 'propriate an' proper. Somebody hold my head, er hit'll bu'st!"

"By ther 'tarnal Heavins, I'll skin a thousan' 'Pache heads, ef ther bellyuns o' ther Pecos harms Marion er ther leetle 'un! You hear me asservate?"

While rattling this off, Old Rocky was saddling his horse at a lively rate; indeed he appeared nearly insane at the communication of the Caddo, in regard to the girl up the Concho, for there were but few people in the little world of the old scout whom he loved and respected as he did the Munroe family.

From the fact that Creeping Cat and his squaw had approached the Concho from a north-west direction, they had obtained a better view of the glare of the conflagration, when the Apaches had burned the Munroe cabin than they could from any other point; as the confluence of the creek with the river, was at a point where the Concho curved westerly.

Star Eyes did not dismount, neither did she speak after her chief had addressed himself to Old Rocky. The Caddo now stood, with stoical face, gazing around the shades, and listening intently; as it was natural for him thus to do on the war-path.

The scout had at once observed, upon the arrival of Creeping Cat, that the latter had freshly applied his war-paint; and this, in itself, had indicated that the Caddo had discovered signs, near or far, he knew not which, of the presence of enemies. But Old Rocky had asked no explanation pointedly, knowing that the chief would reveal everything in his own good time.

It was an imposing picture, that in the little "open"—indeed, a striking one.

The Caddo chief and his squaw were fine specimens of savage beauty, and life, in their adornments and arms; and the steeds, which they bestrode, were well chosen for each. They waited not long, however.

In a remarkably short space of time, the old scout was again in his saddle, and ready for the start.

He had suddenly, become as silent and preoccupied in thought as his red friends; for he well knew that the judgment of Creeping Cat was to be relied on—that there could be no doubt as to the glare of the fire being near or at the point where the cabin of Mad Munroe was situated.

This was terribly to think of, for Old Rocky was positive that the log dwelling would not have caught fire by accident; besides, he knew that Mad Munroe should be at his home, with his wife and child, at the hour of sunset.

Without further words, the chief sprang upon his black steed, and guided the animal directly back to the river; Star Eyes following, and Old Rocky bringing up the rear.

The latter knew that this course was taken in order to give him a chance to see for himself the suspicious glare in the sky as soon as was possible, and he spoke not a word, but followed on as fast as he could ride.

All forded the river, passed through the belt of timber, on the west side of the same, and out on the broad plain.

By this time, the blazing cabin had become nearly consumed; but, at intervals, forked flames shot upward, which, although they did not pass above the tree-tops, cast points of glaring and fiery light far above the belt of towering trees, within the shades of which were the ruins of the dwelling.

A single glance was sufficient for Old Rocky.

He had been satisfied that the chief's words were true; but he knew, by that glance, that the glare was immediately at the confluence of the creek and river, and consequently must be the burning home of his friends. There was little doubt now, in the minds of either of the party, as to the origin of the fire.

They believed it to be the work of marauding Apaches.

What then had been the fate of Mad Munroe, his beautiful wife, and innocent child?

One graceful gesture toward the south was given by the Caddo chief.

That was all, except significant glances.

The situation admitted of no words.

Their course was at once plain and simple.

Away swept Creeping Cat and his squaw at full speed; Old Rocky, with a half-smothered curse of vengeful fury, driving deep his spurs and dashing after.

And on, the trio sped, parallel with the timber of the Rio Concho at a rapid gallop, their objective point being the scarcely distinguishable glow above the far off dark line which marked the course of the creek, as it mingled its waters with the river.

On, like ground-skimming swallows, the three galloped, the silvery moon playing upon their weapons—upon the beads and trinkets of the Caddo chief and his squaw, while the eagle-feathers of the former waved and fluttered in the wind that was created by the headlong speed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRAIRIE PARDS ON THE TRAIL.

THE spot where, but a few hours previous, had stood the vine-embowered log cabin, in which the fair Marion, with her babe in her arms, had been seated, awaiting the return of her hero husband, was but a mass of smoldering ruins, when our three friends, Old Rocky, Creeping Cat, and Star Eyes, their horses panting laboriously and flecked with foam, dashed into the little "open," after fording the creek just west of that point.

"Great Gee-whillikins!"

Thus exclaimed the old scout, in a voice of great astonishment and grief.

He could say no more.

Long had the trio felt a conviction that the dwelling of their friends had been destroyed, but their worst fears were confirmed upon their arrival.

The horses halted suddenly, as if well knowing that their hard and cruel gallop was at an end. They heaved heavy sighs, that were almost groans; they having been greatly taxed in that terrific ride, which could not have been increased in speed had the very lives of the riders themselves depended upon it.

Lively-Legs was, however, the most fatigued, and seemed broken in spirit, trembling in every limb.

The Caddo chief spoke not a word, but cast the jaw-strap of his horse to his squaw, and then sprang to the earth, as did his white pard.

Both then began a careful examination of the ground of the "open."

Occasionally, something very like an oath from the old scout, or an "ugh" of surprise or satisfaction from Creeping Cat, was heard; for the "sign" was as plain to them as the print of a book to an educated person. At length they met, near where Star Eyes awaited them; having examined the ground thoroughly, as well as the adjacent thickets.

"Heap Apaches gone on long dark trail. It is good," asserted the Caddo, with exultation. "Mad Munroe, he great brave. Make good chief. Fight for squaw, fight for pappoose, but get captured."

"Apaches thick as leaves on trees. Got white brother, got squaw, got pappoose, for torture. It is bad. What say Old Rocky? What do?"

The old scout stared about the "open" for a moment, in a dazed manner. He was, for the time, speechless with concern and apprehension.

Then he shuddered, and replied to his red pard, in a low voice:

"Ye're mighty right, Caddo. Thar war a big batch o' ther ha'r-tarers—dang my dorgs, ef thar warn't! But our pard jist fit an' fit, an' laid 'em out cold, es long es he c'u'd pick triggers, er grip his bowie. Howsomdever, ther bellyuns giled onter him, an' he's a goner."

"Purty Marion, an' ther leetle baby too—I jist sw'ar, hit air wuss nor billyus! I'm sick enough ter puke up my knee-pans, but I'll git 'round ter biz 'fore soon."

"What'll I do, yer axes? By ther great Crockett, I'll foller ther trail o' ther pesky sons o' Satan clean ter ther Pecos, an' t'other side, if needcessary! I'll resky 'em, ef hit's recorded I shell do so, er I'll git my ole head skinned, years an' all, a-tryin'!"

"I may be too late ter save 'em from tortur', but ef I bees, I jist everlastin'ly afferdaves that I'll lunge in heavy. I doesn't ax yer ter go 'long, Caddo; fer yer hes Star Eyes with yer, an' hit wouldn't do."

"I wish't I hed a fresh nag, but hit's onpossible ter freeze onter one. I shell leave my critter on good grass now, an' 'zamine ther 'sign' t'other side ther drink, findin' out which way ther condemned scum glided. Then, et sun-up, Lively-Legs'll get peart, I reckon, an' I'll perceed arter 'em. Thar ain't no other way."

"May ther good Lord take keer o' Marion an' ther baby. I'd go ter Camp Johnston arter help, an' a fresh hoss, but hit would ruinate chances. Ef ther sogers gut on the rampage arter our frien's, an' ther 'Paches see'd 'em, es they're dead sure ter do ef they go, hit'll be good-by ter this big ball o' dirt ter Munroe, an' his caliker, an' kid; fer ther or'nary sculpers 'u'd kill 'em all, speedy."

"Dang my dorgs! Didn't we-uns tell Mad Munroe hit war ormighty risky biz ter fotch his caliker hyer? But, he war stubborn es a Mex'can mule, an' now he's ruinated, sure pop—thet is, 'less I gits ther deadwood on snatchin' 'em outen ther 'Pache camp, which air risky, besides ormighty hard ter 'complish."

"Hit's billyus biz, Caddo; right bad billyus biz, clean through!"

This was, in the consideration of the chief, a long and useless speech; but he understood the feelings of Old Rocky, and knew that the latter was nearly distracted with grief and anxiety.

When the old scout had finished, the Caddo spoke:

"Creeping Cat is on war-path. Apache got his white friends. A Caddo chief sits not down when his friends in enemy's camp. Creeping Cat will go on trail of Apaches. Star Eyes will go on trail, for she love white squaw heap, love pappoose too."

"It is good. We will save Mad Munroe and his squaw. Save pappoose too. Come! My white brother look for trail over Concho. Star Eyes stay with mustangs. Creeping Cat look for 'sign' with white brother. I have spoken."

"May ther Great Spirit bless yer, Caddo!" exclaimed Old Rocky, impulsively, and with deep feeling. "Ye're straight up an' squar, I allers knowed, but I didn't keer ter ax yer ter glide on this trail."

"Hit wouldn't be jist right fer Star Eyes ter go, though. Couldn't she skute up ter Camp Johnston ontil we-uns gits back? Thet air, ef we ever does glide this-a-way. Mebbe so we'll git plugged through our in'ards with arrers."

"Star Eyes will go with her chief," put in the young squaw, in a decided tone, and that ended the talk, the Caddo and the old scout crossing the river to study the trail.

They could see that Mad Munroe must have slain a number of the Apaches, but that he himself had been carried away as a captive, for the torture, and his wife to a worse fate; while the babe, they believed, would be killed as soon as it annoyed them on the march by its crying.

The question was, would the Apaches take the captives to their distant village to torture, or would they do their fiendish work at their first camp?

If the first, there were some grounds to hope for a rescue. If the last, it would be too late to save them by the time the war-party could be overtaken.

Creeping Cat believed that Munroe and his wife would be taken to the south side of the Pecos, and hoped that such would be the case; as, in that event, there might be favorable opportunities to rescue the imperiled ones.

The Apache war-party had been encamped in the dense shades of the timber, and had also kept within the same; as they had, after breaking camp, proceeded up the Rio Concho with their captives and booty. Consequently, it was a very difficult matter for our friends to trace them.

But this was considered unnecessary, after the course which the war-party had taken was ascertained by the scouts.

They were encouraged from the fact that they believed the Apaches had kept along up the river, and would, they judged, continue on this course until they had gained a safe distance, when they would no doubt encamp. This would enable our friends, should the savages make a halt in the timber, as was probable, to gain a view of their camp.

They could also approach the same, under cover of the undergrowth, and this would favor greatly a rescue.

Old Rocky and Creeping Cat knew that the mustangs of the Apaches must be much fatigued and broken, for they had ascertained that the war-party had been on a raid down-country and had struck the Concho for the purpose of encamping and resting; but, having, accidentally, as the scouts believed, discovered the cabin, and captured the whites, then setting the dwelling on

fire, they had been forced to break camp, and continue on without rest.

This, they would do of necessity, for they would fear that the blaze or flare had been observed at Camp Johnston; which, if so, would cause a force of "long-knives" to pursue them.

From this line of reasoning, our friends decided that everything was as favorable for their object as could be expected; but it would be an undertaking requiring great caution and cunning in their pursuit, to prevent being discovered by the scouts of the red marauders.

From the fact that the Apaches were returning to their mountain strongholds, beyond the Rio Pecos, Old Rocky and his red pard reasoned that the captives, except the child, would be safe from harm until the Indian village was reached. Then, a grand torture scene would be enacted; the squaws and boys taking an active part in the dread performance.

Therefore, after a council between the Caddo and the old scout, which resulted in these favorable conclusions, they returned to the smoldering cabin, and, with Star Eyes, recrossed the river; the horses being staked upon nutritious grass, and well rubbed down with wads of the same, which were torn from the sward for that purpose.

Then these three greatly fatigued ones rolled themselves in their blankets, and sought repose; for well they knew they would need to be fresh and strong on the morrow, for the difficult and perilous work that was ahead of them.

The Caddo chief had made no objections to having his squaw accompany them in the pursuit of the foe; for, as Marion and her baby were captives, he thought that Star Eyes might be of use, should the helpless ones be secretly rescued.

And the Indian reasoned aright, for the services of Star Eyes were needed greatly; and, only from her presence on the trail, would there have been an opportunity for effecting much that, as will be shown, might otherwise have been impossible.

Bright and early, the trio were astir; and, the mustangs having been attended to, the frugal breakfast was prepared by Star Eyes, while the two men examined more carefully the "sign" about the "open," now favored by the morning light. They were soon enabled to arrive at conclusions, as to the dread occurrences of the previous evening, almost as accurately as if they had been witnesses to the sad scenes.

Their admiration for Madison Munroe, always great, was now more exalted than ever, for they could easily determine the number of Apaches he had slain in his lone and desperate charge, by the blood-stained sward, and where the corpses had pressed down the rank grass and flowers.

After the morning meal had been eaten, the animals were once more equipped; our friends taking the precaution to secrete in a thicket, everything that was not actually needed that would at all incumber them on their ride.

They then proceeded on the trail, which, in the daylight, was clearly defined.

Within an hour they reached the point where the war-party had turned into the timber, and forded the river.

All were surprised and disappointed, indeed greatly concerned, when they discovered that the Apaches had struck off in a westerly direction toward the great bison range, over the broad, open prairie.

The scouts had not for a moment thought that the war-party would have taken this course, as it was at a right angle with the direct route that they should have traveled to reach the Rio Pecos, and their wild haunts beyond the same. They were not only greatly puzzled, but alarmed as well for the safety of the captives.

The course traveled by them showed plainly that the Apaches did not fear any attack from the troops at Camp Johnston, for they could be seen a long way off, when marching over the open prairie.

There was one thing, however, that the Caddo chief now thought of, which gave Old Rocky some relief when explained.

It was this:

That probably the war-party were intending to advance west, until they reached the buffalo range. Then they might, indeed they probably would, turn toward the Rio Pecos, trusting to the frequent stampedes of bison to obliterate their trail. This would insure the savages against pursuit.

This, in the opinion of the old scout, was quite reasonable; but, upon further thought on the subject, he decided that the prospects were gloomy indeed for the unfortunate Munroe family.

The pursuit could not be made without great danger of being discovered afar off; and besides, if the trail of the war-party should be obliterated, there would not be the slightest chance for a rescue.

Taking into consideration the condition of the mustangs of the Apaches, the two scouts at length concluded that the savages would be obliged to strike north, and encamp on the creek west of the military post; that the trail on the prairie was made for the purpose of baffling pursuers, who, if any should be on the trail, could be seen by the Indians from the timber, and without difficulty ambushed.

Having reached this conclusion, our friends abandoned the trail, and, diverging north, eventually arrived at the timber of the creek. This they entered, and traveled beneath, at times riding to the border of the same, to gaze out over the plain. But they could perceive no sign of the war-party, and consequently became more and more anxious each mile they passed over.

The paths which they were obliged to follow, made by wild beasts, were winding and perplexing; and they were twice the length of time passing over the same distance than had they been clear of the timber.

Thus the day wore on, until near its close, before, afar to the southward, they discovered the Apache horde; and also, at the very point where they made this discovery, they detected plain "sign," proving that the red pirates of the plains, had there encamped for hours, beneath the timber bordering the creek.

Then, indeed, were our friends furious; for their animals needed rest, and themselves as well, and they were forced to encamp, while they knew that it was always among the probabilities for a herd of bison to trample out the trail of the painted fiends they were following.

But Old Rocky watched the course of the Indians, and concluded that they could be followed, and that it was yet possible a favorable opportunity might occur to effect a release of the unfortunates.

Not more than a mile distant from the timber, every vestige of grass was trampled into or from the earth by the great tide of buffalo that had rolled southward.

Little did Old Rocky and the Caddo dream that, within but a short gallop of their position, Mad Munroe was at that very moment lying, bound to the plain, suffering the agonies of the lost; and his little child, also, tortured with hunger, thirst, and heat, was now crawling in the dust, around its prostrate and helpless father, causing the wretched man's agony to be increased a hundred-fold!

But this, as the reader knows, was the case; and our friends were fated not to discover the sufferers, until the red sun had sunk, and the silvery moon had illumined the earth. And then, only through the significant presence of the vultures, circling in their aerial flight, and the hungry and howling wolves that clustered around.

CHAPTER XII.

OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH.

FOR prudential reasons, the adventurous trailers decided that it was not best to start over the prairie until the sun had set. Besides, they wished their animals to have as much rest and good grazing as possible, for the prospects were, if they did not succeed in effecting the release of the captives, that they would have a desperate ride over that broad and level plain.

It was probable that the war-party would encamp near the head-waters of the Rio Concho, and there would be the only place to make an attempt at the release of the unfortunate captives.

In consequence of this, after sunset, our three friends struck out from the timber, due south, and rode along in perfect silence; Old Rocky being now doubly "billyus," and for him, somewhat hopeless. They had proceeded for some distance in this way, when suddenly Creeping Cat jerked his horse to its haunches, and pointed skyward, as he spoke to the old scout:

"What does my white brother see?"

"Buzzards, an' a heap o' ther or'nary scum et thet. Why; what of hit?"

"Why do buzzards fly round one place?"

"Cause thar's feed for 'em underneath. Does yer take me fer a fresh-borned calf?"

"Why no fly down, then eat?" asked the chief quickly, without noticing the last remark of his white pard.

"Waal, I'm dang'd ef yer ain't gittin' lunnyfied, Caddo! Dang my dorgs, ef yer ain't! I thought we war on ther trail arter Munroe an' his kaliker. Don't reckon this hyer's ther per-

zact an' proper time ter gaze et dirty buzzards an' sich.

"Let's peramberlate speedy; I smell tortur' on ther air."

"Hark!" directed the chief, gazing northward, in eagerness.

"Thet's wolves," asserted Old Rocky.

"Wolves howls, buzzards fly over one place. Want eat, but what see not dead. Caddo's ears sharp. Hear more sound than wolves. Come! Mebbe so Apache torture captives there?"

And Creeping Cat pointed in the direction of the howling wolves.

As the Indian spoke, he urged his horse to a gallop, Star Eyes following.

"Wa-al, what in dangnation!" growled the old scout. "Ther Caddo hev gone lunnyfied, dead sure an' sartain! Howsomdever, thar mought be somethin' in ther wind."

"Git, Lively-Legs, git!"

And away Old Rocky galloped after his Indian friends; soon overtaking, and riding between them.

Nor did they speed more than half a mile, if that, when the old man cried out, in a voice of extreme amazement and fury, in which there was no little apprehension:

"Jumpin' Jehosaphat! Dang an' double dang my dorgs, ef ther buzzards didn't whisper inter yer years, Creepin' Cat, er I'm a bald-headed pervaricator! Great Crockett's ghost! gaze yunder, will ye?"

"Waugh!" was the solitary ejaculation of the chief.

Then both men spurred deep, jerked their revolvers, and, with loud snorts of pain, the horses bounded forward over the broad and moonlit prairie.

In two minutes more, the rattle of revolvers rung through the night air, mingled with yelp, and howl, and snarl of wolves; as these animals were shot down on all sides, just in time to prevent Mad Munroe and his unconscious little one from being torn in pieces.

Then Old Rocky and Star Eyes sprung to the ground, the latter clutching the nearly dead babe of Marion to her breast, and the scout cutting and slashing insanely at the bonds by which his unfortunate friend was held to the ground. He then lifted the senseless, blood-stained and dust-besmeared young man to a sitting posture.

A tear or two rolled over Old Rocky's beard, while the Caddo chief, with another "Waugh," galloped up, and, tearing a gourd from his saddle-horn, also sprung from his mustang.

"Great Crockett! Ef this hyer ain't billyus, I'll chaw tarantalers fer feed, until I'm skuped in outen ther dew! Dang my dorgs an' cats, ef I ain't sick enough ter puke up my bleed mersheen!"

Thus exclaimed the old scout, as he took the gourd from the Caddo, and poured water between the parched and bleeding lips of Madison Munroe.

Star Eyes performed the same humane act for the child, her beautiful face stamped with concern and pity.

"Thank ther good Lordy, we-'uns 'roved in time!" Old Rocky burst out, with genuine feeling. "Creepin' Cat, ye're a brick an' I'm a dang fresh-borned calf. Ef hit hedn't 'a' bin fer your level head, when yer studied ther buzzard 'sign,' our young pard would ha' gone over ther range sure es shootin'."

"By Crickey! This air jist billyus—bad billyus et thet—but ther wu'st air ter come; fer ther smoky sons o' Satan hev gut Marion till yet."

"How's ther baby, Star Eyes? Hit ain't quite played out, I hopes. Dang my ole heart, ef I ain't all broke up! I'm nigh on ter lunnyfication."

"Mad Munroe ain't dead an' dang my dorgs ef he won't be ravin' mad an' chuck-full o' hyderphobic, when he comes roun' ter biz, an' gits onter ther trail o' ther hellyuns!"

How's ther leetle one? I axed yer, Star Eyes."

"Pappoose he get milk, no die. Long trail to Camp Johnston. Mebbe so die before Star Eyes get there."

"That's what yer orter do, speedy—dang ef yer hedn't! I didn't think yer would come in so handy on ther trail," said the old scout. "Hit's lucky, ormighty lucky, yer come with we-'uns, er we'd be dishd, dead sure, hevin' ther leetle one along."

"Ef yer c'u'd git ter ther camp, ther baby mought pull through."

The child now lay limp in the arms of the squaw, with little signs of life.

As yet, Madison Munroe himself remained as one dead.

Creeping Cat, holding the three horses, stood

gazing around the prairie, taking no notice of the others.

Suddenly, an ejaculation fell from the chief's lips, followed by an explanation:

"Waugh! Look! Milk for pappoose!"

"Ya-as, I should opine thar war," agreed Old Rocky; "a heap o' hit, an' death ter ther hullo' we-uns ef we doesn't levant right lively."

"Ther varmints 'll knock ther trail double cend-ways, ef they doesn't wash us all inter ther yearth."

It was needless for the Caddo to bid the others look, for none but his eagle eyes could have distinguished anything unusual in the appearance of the plain to the northward; but, by listening, they could hear a low but strange sound, and they were sensible of a slight trembling of the earth.

The old scout knew well that a tremendous stampede of buffalo were approaching them, and he at once laid Mad Munroe back upon the ground and sprung erect.

The horses acted uneasy and frightened, pricking their ears forward, as, with eyes glaring wildly, they gazed over the plain in the direction of the singular sound, betraying the fact that they were aware it heralded danger.

"We-uns hev gut ter git up an' git fer ther timber, or we'll be stomped inter flap-jacks 'fore soon. What in thunderation an' dangnation air we-uns goin' ter do with our pard?"

"I wisht he'd come 'roun' ter senserble biz. He ain't hard hurted, 'ceptin' by sufferin' tortur' from want o' drink an' ther heat; but, I reckon, hevin' ther baby nigh, chuck-full o' pain, hev bin wuss nor all t'other hellishness."

"Reckon Lively-Legs 'll hev ter kerry double this time. Whoop-cr-ee! Ther big batch o' buffler air comin' on lightnin' whiz, an' hit's git up an' git now, or flop over an' git killed an' buried both et onc't!"

By this time, a continuous roar, like the first breath of a "norther," was plainly to be distinguished, while the very ground beneath them trembled.

"Old Rocky talk heap good," agreed the chief. "Must ride fast. Look! Our white brother come back from dark-land."

The old scout turned quickly.

Mad Munroe had gained, without assistance, a sitting posture, and was now gazing at his child in the arms of Star Eyes, and seemingly unconscious of the presence of the others.

"Good!" exclaimed Old Rocky, greatly relieved. "Caddo, help me h'ist him inter my saddle."

The chief at once did so.

The young man, after being thus assisted, sat in the saddle as one dazed.

"Hump yerself, Star Eyes, an' jump yer critter," cried Old Rocky, catching the child in his arms. "Thar's death on ther perrarer. Buffler air comin', thick es grass-burrs on ther Grandee!"

Without a word, the squaw sprung into her saddle, the babe being then passed to her; and, pressing it to her breast with her left arm, she clutched the jaw-strap of her mustang, and gazed, for the first time toward the coming danger.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVED FROM THE STAMPEDE.

A LONG black line, and a black sea beyond, were now plainly to be seen, while the sound had increased, to the extent of resembling continuous but distant thunder.

Old Rocky quickly mounted behind Mad Munroe; and Creeping Cat, gaining his saddle, gave a signal for the others to start at once. Away they galloped, toward the dark line of timber that marked the course of the creek, where they had recently been encamped.

The Caddo chief brought up the rear.

Then followed a race for life.

They had already delayed too long to escape the threatened doom easily.

All depended upon the eastern portion of the vast herd keeping compact, and not swerving, by the terrific pressure, nearer the creek than they were.

Old Rocky was forced to drive spurs cruelly, and his horse galloped laboriously beneath its heavy double load.

Creeping Cat maintained his position in the rear, and the mustang of the young squaw bolted ahead, with starting eyes, that were filled with terror; while snorts of fright sounded, and its thin nostrils trembled.

It was a grand and imposing, and yet a most agonizing scene.

The entire vast plain, from the vicinity of the creek as far as eye could reach westward, was one vast sea of frantically frightened bison,

spurning the ground in their strange gait, their humps bobbing up and down like waves, while the very earth shook and quaked, and the air was filled with a thunderous and appalling sound.

Our friends seemed to be doomed to a horrible death.

The rescue of Mad Munroe and his child appeared to have been not only useless, as far as they were concerned, but their brave preservers must now be sacrificed for having attempted to save them.

Did one of the horses fall it would of a certainty doom the rider to death.

All, with their animals, would, if overtaken by that avalanche of brutes, be ground into the earth, leaving no trace of their having ever existed; yet the Caddo chief, with dauntless mien, galloped in the rear with a careless air, as if tempting fate.

The horses, with the exception of the one ridden by Creeping Cat, seemed frightened to frenzy, straining every muscle to gain the friendly timber ahead, while the sea of buffalo swept down toward them at a most frightful rate of speed.

Nearer and nearer to the timber, nearer and nearer rushed that dark and overwhelming tide.

It appeared impossible that the fugitives could reach their haven of safety.

Old Rocky yelled like a fiend.

The horses snorted with terror, but still strained every nerve.

Suddenly the old scout gave a yell of exultation and heartfelt relief.

They had reached the tall grass.

They were safe!

A few minutes later all pulled rein, the horses whirling about, panting from over exertion, and covered with foam, their eyes distended as they gazed at the thousands of bison that were sweeping past.

The Caddo chief just cleared the outer line of madly galloping brutes, the eyes of which glowed like coals of fire from out the long hair of their "mops," while the earth trembled continuously, and a long drawn out and thunderous roar filled the night air.

Then a spurt of fire was seen, a sharp report following, and a buffalo cow on the margin of the big stampede fell to the earth, her calf remaining by her side.

Creeping Cat had fired the shot, and as the cow fell he sprung from his horse, loosening the slack of the neck-ropes which he retained in his hand. Then, drawing his knife, the Indian dexterously severed the udder from the animal, in such a manner as to allow some of the integument from the belly to remain on the same.

This he gathered up carefully in his hand, and with it he approached the group, leading his horse.

Star Eyes quickly dismounted, for she understood the purpose of the chief.

The latter advanced, and handing the udder to his squaw, remarked:

"Here, milk, plenty. Save life of Marion's pappoose."

"Bully fer yeou, Caddo!" cried out Old Rocky, "hit's a cold day when Creepin' Cat gits left, fer a fact."

"Dang an' double dang my ole gizzard, ef we-uns didn't hev a close scrouge! But we made ther rifle—dog'd ef we didn't."

"Yer allers keeps yer head level, Caddo, which air hard fer me ter do, billyus es I've bin of late. But, let's git our pard down from ther critter, an' foteh him back ter Texas biz."

"S'pose we-uns hev a council talk. Thar's a heap ter do ahead, I'm bettin' hefty, afore we-uns gits Marion outen ther cussed heathens' clutches."

"We hain't hed nothin' but baby play so fur, but ther work's a-comin'. Thar's a big crap o' ha'r ter be harvested 'fore soon—perferate my ole perercardium of thar ain't!"

Madison Munroe was then seated upon the grass, and his head bathed, while the old scout procured a flask of brandy from his *malettos*, some of the contents of which he administered to his young pard.

Star Eyes lost no time in squeezing some milk from the cow's udder—it being still warm—into the mouth of the infant; and, in a short time, she was rejoiced beyond measure to observe that the little one swallowed the lacteal fluid quite naturally, and with evident relish.

The young squaw also rubbed some of the buffalo-milk upon the sunburnt face and arms of the child.

And, on rolled that tremendous stampede, presenting a sight so awfully grand that one unaccustomed to a like view would scarce have believed his senses.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR LOVE AND REVENGE.

STAR EYES had removed to a point from which she and the babe could not be seen by the, as yet, but semi-conscious father; and she had striven, in every way, to bring the little sufferer back to as natural a state as was possible under the circumstances.

Old Rocky bathed the dust and blood from the head of Mad Munroe, and poured water over his bruised and swollen wrists and ankles; the creek, near at hand, furnishing an ample supply.

The brandy appeared to have a beneficial effect, but acted slowly; and not a word did the young scout speak, but clasped his palms over his brow and eyes, as if striving to recall the near and awful past, and to realize his present condition.

This state was by no means a strange one, under the circumstances.

In fact, it was remarkable that Munroe retained life, after the sufferings he had endured; his brain having received such terrible shocks, especially when the prairie wolves were about to tear his child to pieces before his eyes. Yet he lived, and seemed gradually coming back to strength and sensibility.

And the infant, as it became somewhat strengthened by the judicious treatment it received at the hands of Star Eyes, recovered still more rapidly; its eyes becoming more and more natural in expression.

As the young squaw noticed this, she was rejoiced and thankful; she having, in the meantime, formed a plan, which she directly put in practice.

She arose to her feet, and taking up the child, came up behind Madison Munroe, whose eyes were still covered with his hands. She then gently placed the infant on his knee.

The little one gazed upward, with a very natural look.

Quickly the young scout removed his hands from his face, and looked downward.

His three friends stood, watching him with much interest and anxiety.

Instantly, from his lips, came words of deepest thankfulness:

"Thank Heaven! Oh! thank Heaven! My child! My poor child! But where, where is Marion? My brain is on fire!"

As Munroe thus spoke, he clasped the little one to his breast, and for some time seemed overcome by the rush of emotions its presence brought upon him.

"Easy, pard Madison, easy! Yer hes bin through a right smart chance o' hellishness, an' hes skinned out o' hit without breakin' a bone."

"Thar's yer baby, O. K., an' neither yeou nor bitain't hurted ter last. But hit's bin purty clost' work—mighty clost' shavin'—bet yer back ha'r!"

"We-uns air waitin' fer yer ter come roun' ter biz, fer thar's work, an' mighty hot an' heavy work et thet ahead jist now."

"Bout how does yer wag fer a big boss scout, wi' me an' Creepin' Cat? Ef hit hedn't bin fer ther Caddo, yer'd ha' gone under, sure pop. Thar wouldn't ha' bin a greases-pot left o' yer, er ther baby either—not enough ter bait a hook fer cat-fish."

Mad Munroe's whole form quivered with the intensity of his emotions, and he now struggled to a standing posture, still holding the child in his arms. The next moment, he passed the little one to Star Eyes, and extended a hand to each of his pards, white and red; as he said, in a strange and unnatural voice:

"May Heaven bless you both, my true and brave friends! I have been through such torture as would wreck most men's minds. It seems now like a horrid dream, more than a reality, but, alas! I know but too well how dreadfully real it is."

"I know as well as though you had told me in so many words, that my dear wife is in the power of the same merciless fiends, who condemned me to a terrible death, and my child as well. Oh, Father in Heaven,"—raising his eyes, and clasped hands—"I ask for strength to follow the trail of those painted demons!"

"Creeping Cat, and Old Rocky," the young man continued, dropping his hands, and looking toward the two men whom he addressed: "hear me! I swear to tear my poor Marion from those Apache devils, even though they be a thousand strong!"

"I'll rescue her, or both of us shall die by their weapons. Let me have one of your horses, and tell me which way the monsters rode—which direction their trail points. You will do this for me, will you not? I'll rescue my wife, if I wado knee-deep in blood!"

Most impressive in speech and manner, was the young scout as he thus spoke; his eyes, all the while, glaring fiercely.

It was plainly evident to his listeners, that he would become a raving maniac, if pursuit were not at once made.

Yet what could be done?

Munro had no horse.

"Does yer s'pose we-uns ain't in w.' yer, pard Madison, in ther cut, shoot, an' t'ar ha'r biz? Does yer s'pose we-uns ain't goin' ter see ther hull biz through?"

"Dang my dorgs, ef I'd throw up my chances o' skinnin' 'Pache heads fer a hull section o' Texas dirt, grass throwed in! An' Creepin' Cat 'u'd sculp hisself, ef he gut scrouged outen ther game."

"Howsomdever, thar's no critter fer yer ter straddle, 'ceptin' a bufler; but thar's heaps o' them animiles clost by."

As Old Rocky ceased speaking, Star Eyes stepped forward, and placed the jaw-strap of her mustang in the hand of Mad Munroe, saying:

"Here good horse for white brother. Ride fast for Marion. Star Eyes will walk to Camp Johnston. She will carry pappoose. It is good."

The old scout looked, for the moment, as though he had been suddenly paralyzed.

At length he found utterance.

"Wa'al, dang my dorgs! Who'd ha' thunk o' that? Hit's jist ther way, an' ther only way ter 'range hit."

"Star Eyes, ye're es purty es a home-made angel, an' more chief nor squaw when yer gits in a tight place. Ef yer kin skin through ther station, we-uns is O. K. fer ther trail. But, what yer goin' ter fight with, pard Munroe?"

Without further words the young squaw passed her revolver and knife to Madison, who accepted the weapons reluctantly, and only after the chief had spoken.

"Good," was the remark of the Caddo, when he witnessed the act of his squaw. "Star Eyes, she got bow. She got arrows. Come!"

"Buffalo gone. War-trail open. War-whoop on lips. Creeping Cat has spoken."

With these words the chief sprang astride his black steed.

"Whoop-er-ee! Dang my dorgs, ef things ain't comin' out O. K. fer all consarned, an' right smart billyus fer ther smoky sons o' Satan what hes got Marion!"

"I smell bleed, 'Pache bleed, on the air. I feel ha'r, 'Pache ha'r, atween my fingers. Come out! Even ther bufler hev cl'ar'd ther way, an' thet's a good sign."

"I'm fer perergrinatin', peramberlatin', percedin', purty pertickler speedy. Star Eyes, so-long! Take good keer o' ther baby, an' I'll see yer purty fortygraft later. Whoop!"

Both Mad Munroe and Creeping Cat had spurred toward the trampled plain, before the old scout had gotten through with his remarks; the chief waving an adieu to his squaw, whom he might never again behold. And she, with the child of Marion Munroe in her arms, strode into the dark shades of the timber, casting but one glance over her shoulder at the fast-speeding trio, on the trail for revenge and rescue.

The vast herd of bison had passed on, swerving easterly, to crash through the timber of the Rio Concho; and there the stampede would, without doubt, be gradually broken, as the wrangling mob of beasts plunged into the timber and river, their speed becoming much less, through fatigue, before reaching that point.

Thus the way was providentially opened for the wronged and desperate Munroe, who, knowing the direction the Apaches had taken, and were when last seen, proceeding, galloped with almost a certainty of striking the Concho river below the probable camping-place of the marauders.

Should he and his two friends luckily accomplish this, they could, with proper caution, steal under cover of the dense undergrowth, through the timber to the Apache camp.

But, only through strategy could they hope to rescue poor Marion.

Knowing this, both Old Rocky and the Caddo chief were much concerned, in regard to the condition of Mad Munroe, but they hoped the long gallop that was before them would calm the young man's brain somewhat, and then they might be successful in reasoning with him.

It was above all things necessary that they should prevail upon him to curb his impetuous fury and insane anxiety, to the extent of causing him to realize that he was jeopardizing the life of his wife, and indeed the lives of their own little party as well, by rushing matters.

Hour after hour, the trio of rescuers and avengers galloped. On, over the trampled plain, the ceaseless thumping of the hoofs of their steeds, and the panting of those hardly-taxed animals, being the only sounds that broke the death-like silence of that dreary and barren prairie.

No one spoke a word.

Mad Munroe had ample food for thought, thought most torturing to his already agonized brain. The ride was too rapid for conversation, and besides there was little necessity for their saying anything; for all knew the work that was before them, and that it was, to say the least, very possible that they were galloping to their death—riding, headlong, to meet their fate at the torture stake, if not to be butchered in an assault.

Yet this thought was hardly, even for a moment, taken into consideration. The imminent peril of poor Marion was what was uppermost in the minds of all.

Fast though they rode, they did not urge their horses to their greatest speed, for that would have been foolish, as, without much doubt, they would be pressed in a mad chase by the Apaches, should they succeed in rescuing Marion.

Besides, they believed that they would be able to reach the Rio Concho at the point they desired, and thus gain the vicinity of the enemy's camp during the small hours of the morning. This would be the most favorable time to attempt a rescue, either secretly or by a bold or daring dash.

It was indeed a most reckless undertaking—that which our friends contemplated, or in fact had already decided upon; for they knew, by having carefully examined the "sign," that there were nearly three-score of braves in the Apache war-party.

But they were also aware that there was more chance to succeed than did they have a full company of cavalry at their backs; for, in such a case, Marion would be butchered by the savages at the first alarm.

They were confident, by the condition in which they felt sure the mustangs of the Indians must be, that the latter would encamp as soon as water and grass were reached. They, therefore, aimed to strike the Concho east of the point at which they believed the marauders had encamped, and so far from the same as not to expose themselves to discovery, when they approached the timber that bordered the river.

When the dark line that marked the course of the Rio Concho was discovered in the distance, the friends proceeded at a slow pace, keeping a lookout for a blaze or glow from a camp-fire up the stream to the west; but none was visible.

The Caddo, however, caught sight of a flash through the trees, probably as some one of the sentinels near the Apache encampment ignited his calumet from a twig thrust into the smoldering embers of a nearly extinguished fire.

At any rate, the chief now felt confident that he had located correctly the camp of the red foe, and followed by his two white pards, the Creeping Cat went cautiously forward.

CHAPTER XV.

AMONG THE APACHES.

THE bright and silvery moon shines down upon the earth, casting bars, and arrows, and splashes of light through the limbs of the towering trees that border the upper waters of the Rio Concho, and flooding with its light a natural "open" quite near the slowly rolling river, which, where the smiles of Dame Luna reach it, seems like molten silver.

From the branches of the trees hang long, slowly waving festoons of "old man's beard," or Spanish moss, the whisperings of which, in the evening zephyr, are to the full as weird as its pall-like appearance.

The dense undergrowth of thorny shrubs, vines, and cacti are dark; no ray of the moon penetrating the lower shades, where the wild beasts find safe and secret covert.

It is a wild scene, but rendered wilder still, and more savage, indeed infernal, by those who have invaded those solitudes for this particular night.

The moonlit "open," which has been mentioned, has been taken as a camping-place for his war-party, by Red Wolf, the Apache chief. On the western portion of this "open" are many mustangs, which are kept from roaming by the wall of tangled undergrowth, and from interfering with the slumbers of their master by three guards.

On the eastern side, across from the animals

upon the grassy sward, lay more than half a hundred hideous warriors of the Pecos, sleeping as soundly as though their hands had never been bathed in innocent blood, or the dying shrieks of their many tortured victims had never pierced their ears.

Frightful, indeed, they appeared, as the silvery moonlight revealed their daubs of war-paint upon breast, face and arms, for the mild air of the night requires no blanket covering in this latitude and season.

Their many-colored blankets, stolen in raids into Montezuma Land, are spread upon the sward for them to repose upon, and these add to the effect of the imposing, but savage scene.

Lances are thrust into the earth, from which hang shields, quivers and bows trimmed with scalps, many of which are flaxen and golden, torn from the heads of innocent children and lovely maidens!

The camp-fires are but smoldering embers, mostly hidden from view by a covering of ashes.

There are but three awake in the camp. These are young braves, who guard the horses and their brother warriors; although, from the fact that but this number has been detailed, it is evident that the Apaches are not apprehensive of pursuit. They had doubtless heard the rumbling noise made by the stampede of bison, and thus knew that their trail had been obliterated.

Thus far, as we have described the camp, all was clear and distinct as it lay in the moonlight; and one would not notice the most impressive portion, or figure in the scene which was at the border of the "open."

There, bound fast to the trunk of a small tree, was poor Marion Munroe, her beautiful face pale as death, and upturned to the sky. Her shapely head leaned against the tree, and her lips, which were almost colorless, moved as if in earnest prayer for deliverance.

Her hair had fallen loose from its bands, and was hanging in wild and tangled disorder over her shoulders. Her clothing was in tatters. Her eyes were glassy and staring, and were filled with a hopeless despair that was awful and heartrending to behold.

It was a picture such as no civilized person would care to look upon a second time, if powerless to relieve the poor sufferer.

Little grounds had Marion to expect the deliverance, for which she evidently prayed; indeed, she had none whatever. Perhaps, after all, it was only death that she longed for; believing, and with good cause, that both her husband and her darling babe were already free from torture, and beyond the ills and pains of earth.

The Apaches, also, doubtless believed that their victims had been trampled to death, beyond the semblance of humanity.

Slowly, as the moon rode through the heavens, a bar of its silvery light was brought to bear, through the branches, upon the fair angelic face and head of poor Marion; seeming an encouragement to hope, and as if her prayer for rescue was to be answered.

What a contrast the fair captive presented to her surroundings—to the hideous demons who now lay outstretched in sleep!

But that bar of moonlight was surely Heaven sent!

It did good service.

It revealed, to three crouching and slowly creeping forms, which stole up from the bank of the river, her whom they most desired to see—her whom they had sworn to rescue from the fiends who held her.

These were the avengers, Mad Munroe, Old Rocky, and Creeping Cat, the Caddo.

The first mentioned had become more rational, and strove bravely to restrain his insane desire to dash into the camp of the Apaches, and tear his loved wife from the tree. Both the Caddo and the old scout placed their hands upon his arms, the moment they perceived the sad spectacle, so agonizing to the young man.

"Dang my dorgs, pard," whispered Old Rocky; "glide easy now, easy er our gravy's spilled an' Marion's a goner!"

"Everythin' hev gut ter be did pertickler proper, er we-uns 'll never propel over ther per-rars in futur'. Hit's a pesky perdicement. 'Bout how'd we-uns better perceed on ther p'o-gramme?"

"Creeping Cat go other side of 'open.' Shake bush. Apache come see what make noise. Caddo knife find heart."

"Old Rocky, he shake bush here. Kill Apache when come this way. Mebbe so other brave come, too. He must go on long, dark trail."

"Mad Munroe, he crawl to squaw. Be ready

to cut free. If braves yell, then run fast to mustangs. Gallop on plain.

"Old Rocky come soon. Creeping Cat come soon, if no lose scalp! Big talk on war-path no good. It is enough. I have spoken."

Thus the chief arranged the "p'ogramme."

"Yer gut hit right ter ther p'int, I swan ter christy!" said the old scout, with a much more hopeful look than before.

"Dang my dorgs, ef thet ain't ther purtiest an' most proper p'ogramme I ever knowed laid out! Yer head's level, Caddo, all through ther hull biz. Perceed ter glide!"

"I'll work ther rifle hyer. Pard Munroe, crawl ornighly slow, an' don't crack a stick, er hit'll be death, dead sure, ter ther hull o' we-uns."

No further words were spoken, and the young scout remained silent, his eyes being fixed in a strange stare upon the moon-illuminated face of his poor wife. But he showed that he had noted every word, by immediate action. He crawled through the undergrowth, but with the greatest caution and slowness; thus proving his remarkable strength of will.

Creeping Cat had gone, as soon as Old Rocky had agreed to his plan of proceeding, to make a half-circuit of the camp.

The old scout watched eagerly the opposite thicket, across the "open," in order to know when the Caddo arrived at that point. A slight rustle of a bush ere long betrayed the fact that the chief had reached his post.

Then Old Rocky, his knife clutched firmly, and every sense and muscle strained, shook the bushes, near his position.

He paused, and awaited developments.

The brave nearest him stepped quickly to the scene of the disturbance, doubtless believing that he was about to secure a rabbit for his breakfast.

One glance across the "open" showed Old Rocky, that the sentinel on that side had stalked toward the covert of the Caddo; neither of the braves seeming aware of the movements of the other, while the third, the last remaining guard, was engaged in disentangling the leg of a mustang from the animal's neck-rope.

Old Rocky crouched, ready for "biz."

Life and death depended upon the moment, and the skill of himself and his red pard.

Totally unsuspecting of danger, indeed dreaming not that a foe was within a day's ride, the young brave stole into the thicket; his form half bent, and his knife in his hand, ready to hurl at the supposed rabbit.

When the form of the Apache had gone so far within the undergrowth as to be concealed from view at the "open," the old scout knew that the time for immediate action on his part had arrived.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VOW WAS KEPT.

THE old scout gave a panther-like leap, and grasping the Apache by the throat in a vise-like grip, drove his bowie-blade, buckhorn deep, into the back of the savage, the steel grating, with a sickening sound, through the severed bones!

And, as quickly as the blade jerked free, when a spurt of hot blood flew over the foliage. Then followed a struggle, a writhing, accompanied by a gasping and gurgling sound, and all was still.

The young brave had gone on the "long dark trail."

Old Rocky laid the body softly upon the ground, and then slashed off the scalp; but hardly had he done this when the remaining sentinel also strode toward the river, evidently thinking that his fellow-guard had gone for some water, and had met with a slight accident, though unworthy of a signal for help.

Within two minutes, the scalpless corpse of this Apache lay beside the other; and the mustangs and sleeping warriors of Red Wolf were unguarded, for the Caddo had slain his man also. The next moment, the latter was seen leading a fine horse from the herd into the thicket.

The old scout knew that this animal was for the use of one of the party, as they had but their own three steeds, and now Marion would be with them.

Thus far all had gone well.

The next move was to gain the point at which their horses had been left secreted.

One glance showed Old Rocky that Mad Munroe had succeeded, for Marion was not at the tree to which she had been secured. He at once stole to the rendezvous.

There he found Munroe and Marion, with the Caddo chief.

It was quite dark where they were standing. There was no time for expressions of joy, or words of any kind.

In more than one signification of the expression, our friends were not yet "out of the woods" by any means.

There was, indeed, a call for immediate action, or all was lost.

Up to this time they had providentially been greatly favored. But the Fates were ever fickle, as the recent and awful past had but too plainly proven.

To many, the word would have been flight, and rapid and instant at that; but this was far from the intention of the three border heroes. They had not forgotten their vows of vengeance.

Marion was at once placed upon the horse that had been given up to Madison by Star Eyes; her husband taking the mustang that had just been captured by Creeping Cat from the Apaches.

Marion was then directed to speed over the plain, as soon as she was free from the timber, and proceed north; and the trio of pards promised that they would soon overtake her.

She could not refuse to follow the instructions thus given.

Her protests would have been disregarded, and, although greatly concerned and anxious as to the safety of her husband, and his exposing himself again to capture, she complied.

Then our friends made ready for the grand effort they decided upon.

They had kept one oath, in the rescue of Marion; and they now intended to keep the other—that of revenge.

Slowly, and as silently as was possible they gained the southern side of the camp of the savages, near the river-bank.

On the north side there was an open passage to the plain beyond.

They led their horses at the first, but mounted when they reached the point that has been mentioned. Then they jerked revolvers, and took aim at the nearest of the sleeping savages.

All pressed trigger at once.

A thunderous report awoke the echoes of the Rio Concho timber, and then, with terrific yells, our three friends spurred forward, firing a fusillade, as the dumfounded Apaches sprang from their blankets.

The mustangs snorted, and became mingled in a single mass. Then they bounded in wild fright, from the "open" to the plain northward, in a terrific stampede.

Death-yells sounded at the first reports of the revolvers.

The Indians were so bewildered that they had not, at first, sufficient presence of mind to gain their weapons in any order.

Some fell over others, and they became terrified and wrangling; fire flashing from the deadly barrels of their revolvers, and the leaden messengers of death hurtling through the demoralized Apaches; while, high above the din, rung the vengeful war-whoop of Creeping Cat, the Caddo, and the fierce yells of Old Rocky and Mad Munroe.

Apaches fell dead and wounded in one mass, the living intermingled; and, not until their weapons were emptied, did our friends speed out from the Apache camp, and over the plain, to join the waiting Marion.

She, regardless of order, had, in her great anxiety, halted upon hearing the rapid reports of the revolvers, mingled with the whoops and mad yells.

But with an outcry of glad joy, as she beheld her hero husband, returning toward her, she sped on northward, parallel with the herd of stampeding mustangs.

The danger was past!

The red marauders could not pursue, and our friends had accomplished one of the most daring and reckless acts ever performed on the border.

They were but three in number, but they had slain half a score of Apaches, had wounded many more, demoralized the remainder, and stolen all their mustangs; besides rescuing Marion, the most important achievement of all.

They now signaled Marion to slack the pace of her steed, and then, when they had joined her, all swerved in their course westward, and gained control of the herd of Indian horses; driving the same, at a stampede toward Camp Johnston.

Turning in their saddles, they now saw the mad mob of Apaches rush out from the bottom-timber, yelling like fiends. And, it was no wonder; for they would be obliged to walk to their village, in the far-away Apache mountains, leaving behind, in the hands of their ene-

mies, all their mustangs, besides losing their captive and a number of their warriors.

The savages had recognized Mad Munroe, whom they had left fast bound upon the plain to die, and this had filled them with superstitious wonder, thus adding to their demoralization.

There is little more to relate.

It will suffice to say that the scouts were successful in driving the vast herd of mustangs to Camp Johnston, realizing a considerable sum afterward by the sale of the animals at a point further east.

Marion's relief and happiness had been great upon having been released, and finding herself in the arms of the husband whom she had believed dead—trampled to death by the buffalo, for she had heard the sound of the great stampede—but, when Star Eyes delivered to the young mother her child into her arms, as tears of joy and thankfulness rolled down Marion's cheeks, then, indeed, was her happiness complete.

This was in the presence of the officers and men at the post, and many eyes unused to weeping grew moist, and were brushed hastily by rough sleeves at the sight of this re-united family.

Old Rocky's beard was again wet with "eye-water," and he exclaimed to his red pard:

"Dang my dorgs, ef hit warn't billyus, bad billyus et that! An' I hed an appetite ter puke up my toe-nails a heap o' times arter seein' ther cabin war burned, but this hyer makes me sicker than a gorged kiote—cuss my cats ef hit doesn't."

"We-uns hed a power o' peramberlatin' an' perergratin', but ther purserlanimous pirates o' Paches hed ter propel afoot-back ter ther Pecos, dang the'r pesky pictur's! An' thet's a powerful piece o' consolation."

It is almost needless to say that Mad Munroe hastened to take his loved ones back to Fort Mason, and that he never again imperiled their lives by exposing them on the extreme frontier.

Creeping Cat, Star Eyes, and Old Rocky received due praise and commendation from the officers and men of Camp Johnston, and the thanks and life-long friendship of Madison and Marion Munroe. This was proved in many ways, in the years that followed.

But this was not the last time, by several, that these invincible prairie pards were together amid stirring scenes of danger and death; or proved their fraternal regard for each other, when dangers threatened upon the plains.

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